DIGITAL DISSIDENCE AND POLITICAL CHANGE:

CYBERACTIVISM AND CITIZEN JOURNALISM

IN EGYPT

By

Courtney C. Radsch

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Chair: P T Jackson

Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, Ph.D.

Diane Singerman

Diane Singerman, Ph.D.

Marwan Kraidy, Ph.D.

Dean of the School of International Service

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by

Courtney C. Radsch

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Dedicated to the amazing young men and women in Egypt who, against all odds, led a revolution that overthrew an authoritarian leader. Although the revolution is not yet over, your peaceful uprising was an inspiration to all, and I am thankful that is some small way I got to know many of you. In particular, this dissertation is dedicated to those who gave of their time and knowledge to help me understand and learn about the movement you were creating.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyses how a youth-led, technologically driven social movement led a collective political struggle for change in Egypt that revolved around the legitimacy of the existing system and demanded rights to expression and participation. It seeks to understand the political impact of new ICTs, namely blogs and networked social media, in authoritarian contexts through the use of Egypt as a case study and by employing new methods of ethnographic inquiry that link the online and the off-line in recognition that they are mutually constituted.

I propose that focusing on the micropolitics of practices and discourse, with due consideration of structural and institutional dynamics, reveals how epistemological and ontological changes take place when a distributional shift in the primary modes of communication occurs, and thus helps us better understand how ICTs are implicated in processes of political change.

I argue that Egypt's young cyberactivists, and particularly citizen journalists, radically shifted the informational status quo by witnessing, putting on record and imbuing political meaning to symbolic struggles to define quotidian struggles against social injustice, harassment and censorship as part of a broader movement for political reform. A central contention in this

dissertation, therefore, is that blogging and social media reconfigure the potentiality for expression and participation, but that it is the particular concatenations of technologically-inflected repertoires of contention that transform potentiality into actuality. This analysis reveals the mechanisms by which the potentiality of the Internet and social media is transformed into concrete instantiations of political struggle through activism, news making practices, and collective action.

Throughout the dissertation I analyze specific episodes of contention to explain how ICTs facilitated collective identity formation, organization, mobilization and advocacy, with far fewer organizational and logistical barriers, rendering the dynamics of contentious politics in this case distinctive from other revolutionary periods. This new youth movement created innovative repertoires of contention, which they developed and adapted very quickly, constrained less by structural factors such as economics and distance, which the properties of ICTs help overcome, than they would have been in the past.

I argue that it is not sufficient to explore only moments of collective action, because this does not explain how the "maker of claims" came to identify themselves as such, nor how they build consensus around their claims. This is of particular interest in the new communications environment of the post-millennial period, and therefore I also focus on the phenomenological lifeworlds of these cyberactivists to show how networked social media gave opposition and subaltern groups, such as liberal secularists or the Muslim Brotherhood, new tools for individual and collective identity creation and enabled freedom of expression and opinion.

The empirical focus of the article is Egypt but I argue that the mechanisms and dynamics identified have a much wider domain of application. I propose several new mechanisms including *asabiyah*, *ijma'*, and *isnad* to explain movement dynamics and to account for the

technological aspect of cyberactivists' repertoires of contention, and propose revising the concept of amplification and certification to account for the fact that the algorithmic properties of ICTs now play a role in contentious repertoires.

PREFACE

When I began studying the impact of new media in Egypt in 2006 the Internet was new and social networking usually took place at a bar. But after spending just one day on the ground I became fascinated by the centrality of media in youth activism and the emerging Egyptian blogosphere. I had just left the *New York Times* and was struck by the power of bloggers in the mainstream U.S. media and rapid changes underway in the media ecosystem, and I wanted to know more about what changes were taking place in the Egyptian mediasphere. Not long after I started my research, I started to believe that indeed these Internet-based ICTs could have profound cumulative effects, and presented a paper at the IAMCR conference in Cairo based on my initial research entitled 'The Revolution Will be Blogged: Cyberactivism in Egypt.' But as the process of writing the dissertation stretched over the years, the cumulative effect of a politics of small things became even more apparent when President Hosni Mubarak stepped down. Nonetheless, even without revolutionary change, the findings presented in this dissertation have implications for social movements across the world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The process of writing a dissertation is a long and often lonely one, particularly when trying work full time through most of it. Without the support of my husband, Rabih Chamas, I would not have been able to pursue my degree and career simultaneously. He supported me while I was away in the field for months at a time, and came with me to Dubai so I could take a job with the Arabic news channel Al Arabiya, and then to Paris for a position with UNESCO focusing on freedom of expression in the Middle East. These positions, along with my work for an NGO campaigning for freedom of expression, provided a comprehensive 360 degree view of my dissertation topic, and I am grateful that he accompanied me to wherever my job took us while constantly expressing his belief that I completing the writing of this dissertation was indeed within my reach. Thank you also to my parents Peter and Pamela, who laid the foundation for my love of learning, for their support, and for letting me spend a solid couple of months writing from their home.

I would like to thank the National Security Education Program (NSEP) for awarding me a Boren Fellowship that enabled me to study Arabic at Georgetown University and to conduct six months of fieldwork in Egypt in 2008. I would also like to thank the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) for granting me a Predissertation Fellowship for International Collaboration (PFIC), which enabled me to go to Egypt in the summer of 2006, and my sponsor, Dr. Nailah Hamdy at the American University of Cairo. Thank you to my committee members, especially Diane Singerman for urging me on and keeping me grounded, and to Patrick Thaddeus Jackson for helping me figure out that indeed I did have something more than just a journalistic account.

In particular I would like to thank the Egyptian bloggers and journalists who gave their time and support to this research. Thank you to the hundreds of Egyptians who shared their experiences, invited me along, and let me into their world. To those who are named in this dissertation, and those who are not, I could not have accomplished this without you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: CYBERACTIVISM AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

"Political change doesn't always happen with a bang – it often starts with just a whisper"
Jeffrey C. Goldfarb

For 18 days in early 2011, millions of people took to the streets of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and elsewhere in Egypt to demand that their president, Hosni Mubarak, step down, refusing to live in fear any longer. The initial call for a nationwide protest against corruption and abuse on January 25 was via a Facebook event created on the hugely popular 'We are all Khaled Said' fan page. The page was named after a young Egyptian businessman who had been beaten to death by police earlier in the year and whose violent death was caught on video and posted on social media, and all of its 350,000 'fans' were invited to join.

The week prior, Tunisia's ruler of 23 years left Tunis for Saudi Arabia after being driven from power by a popular uprising. Inspired by what happened in Tunisia, a young Egyptian man named AbdelRahman Mansour[1] posted the call for a popular protest on the group's Facebook wall and asked his friend, Wael Ghonim at Google in Dubai, to help him promote it. At least 56,000 people RSVPed to attend within the first 24 hours, with more than 50,000 more signed on by Jan. 17. Cautioning that people needed to communicate about the protests to a broader swath of society, cyberactivists coordinated their activities with on-the-ground grassroots organizing to bridge the digital divide between the 24.5 percent of Egyptians online and the rest of Egypt's 80 million citizens (Africa 2011, 4). Egyptians turned out in the streets in numbers not seen in

[1] The spelling used for Arabic names throughout this dissertation reflects how the individuals tend to spell their own names, or the most common spelling based on Google search results.

decades. Inspired by the success of Tunisia's citizens in ousting their president, Egyptians snatched the moment, building on several years of grassroots organizing, digital activism and political awareness-raising that were indelibly shaped by the information and communication technologies of the era. But who were these people who risked violence and incarceration to take to the streets and to their blogs? Why did they risk life and limb to engage in collective action? And how did an ad hoc group of youth topple an entrenched dictator and start a revolution?

This dissertation goes beyond the tired argument about whether or not social media caused the revolution and instead examines the particular ways in which Egyptians adopted, adapted and integrated these new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enable political participation, pioneering new forms of cyberactivism and creating a youth movement that was inextricably bound up with and shaped by these new media. It moves beyond the anecdotal approach that has driven much of the research about the Internet and social media in the Middle East, often driven by breathless press coverage of the latest Internet-based platform by providing a theoretically grounded framework for analyzing how the confluence of the right technology used in the right ways at the right times and in the right sequences can generate powerful outcomes that upend established institutions and fundamentally reconfigure the status quo.

Rather than concentrating on the outcome of social mobilization, this study explores the individual and collectives processes of contention and participation and the specific role new media technologies played in these. Drawing on the concept of mechanisms and contentious repertoires from social movement theory and Bourdieu's field theory, the analytical framework proposed in this study explains why and how cyberactivism can have political impact in authoritarian regimes. It specifies how youth were able to take advantage of momentous

technological changes in information and communication technology in seemingly small ways that nonetheless had serious consequences for an authoritarian regime accustomed to controlling information flows and dominating the public sphere. These consequences included: reconfiguring the journalistic field and challenging the hegemony of the state over the media ecosystem; reconfiguring the boundaries of the public sphere and who gets to participate; forcing authoritarian regimes to make tradeoffs between control and openness in their policy choices; and upending traditional generational and authority hierarchies, from the privileged role of the mainstream media (MSM) to the hegemony of the political elite. Therefore I focus specifically on analyzing the impact of this new contentious politics on the journalistic field, in which the mainstream media are situated, and on the political field, in which political movements like Kefaya and the oppositional Muslim Brotherhood, were situated. Negotiations between such dichotomies run through the entire story. The tension between privacy versus publicity, activism versus journalism, professional versus amateur, young versus old, physical versus virtual and conformity versus *itjihad* (independent reasoning) are found in each contentious episode.

The Research Question

Using a single case study, Egypt, this dissertation seeks to answer the research questions: 1) How do social media enable contentious politics? 2) How are ICTs implicated in processes of political change? 3) What is the political impact of blogs and social media in authoritarian contexts? 4) Does citizen journalism alter the dynamics of state-dominated media systems and if so, why?

With respect to the term "politics" in the questions driving this research, I mean the exercise of power and decision-making that establishes a particular order, or reality, that becomes taken as granted. Politics in the Middle East, and for the matter globally, are often studied as if they only comprise formal political processes like elections or legislating, but to understand political change we need to get beyond the traditional locus of politics and prevailing definitions of participation as attempting to influence the government or formal institutions (Singerman 1995, 4). Politics pervades the daily lives of individuals, particularly in authoritarian, paternalistic countries like Egypt, calling for an approach that focuses on politics from the ground-up or micropolitics. Goldfarb argues that micropolitics, or what he calls the politics of small things, can be politically consequential and lead to political change through the creation of a new social reality and virtual polis via expressive interactions and dialogue about alternative ideologies. Indeed his observation that "consequential political life develops in small spaces where dialogue generates political power" may have emerged from studying the social movements that helped topple the Soviet Union and gave rise to the Christian Right in America, but were also apparent in the case of post-Millennial Egypt (Goldfarb 2006). Blogs and social media, I argue, were the small spaces where young people generated dialogue and imagined a different future that undermined the hegemony of the political status quo. These communicative spaces were places in which identities were socially negotiated, group identities created and articulated, free speech practiced and symbolic power generated, forming an alternative public sphere and new fields of power.

Focusing on the micropolitics of power, the day to day interactions, conversations and lived practices of individuals, makes it possible to see how pockets of resistance emerge, subversively re-codifying power relations even if the political-economic structure and

functioning of the state remains intact (Foucault 1980, 123; Goldfarb 2006). Thus investigating how Egyptian youth fashioned a new public sphere in the blogosphere, or forced the issues of sexual harassment and torture from the private sphere into the public sphere, or pushed the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership to revise its political platform to be more egalitarian, can reveal how resistance took place and how incremental shifts in power relations occurred. In the following chapters I analyze how the youth who were at the forefront of adopting these new technologies used them to create new possibilities and challenge boundaries and tradition, whether in the political field, the journalistic field, or the Muslim Brotherhood.

Indeed, long before the 2011 uprising, Egyptian bloggers had succeeded in putting new issues on the public agenda and challenged the dominance of the mainstream media. They coordinated collective action and organized habitual and ongoing protests in the streets and in the blogosphere, and helped each other learn how to use online platforms to express their opinions and focus on their passions. In this dissertation I argue that Egypt's young cyberactivists, and particularly citizen journalists, radically shifted the informational status quo by witnessing, putting on record and imbuing political meaning to symbolic struggles to define quotidian struggles against social injustice, harassment and censorship as part of a broader movement for political reform. Indeed this case study underscores Bourdieu's insight that the "simple report, the very fact of reporting, of putting on record as a reporter, always implies a social construction of reality that can mobilize (or demobilize) individuals or groups," and I argue that this is precisely what happened in Egypt during the first decade of the 2000s, or what I term the post-millennial period (Bourdieu 1998, 21).

I therefore started from the postulate that politics has always blended with the dominant media of the era, from the use of papyrus by the ancient Egyptians to extend their empire, to the

role of the printing press in the secularization of politics in Europe, to the use of television commercials by political candidates in contemporary America (Altheide and Snow 1979). The media, I believe, are therefore central to any analysis of political power or change, and thus invite a particular focus on representational power and the journalistic field. Communication technology impacts politics because it enables and constrains particular forms of communication and contestation. The way people use and integrate networked social media into micro political practices can lead to incremental changes that can have a cumulatively powerful impact on the status quo.

This dissertation analyzes how young Egyptians used cyberactivism to create a youth-led, technologically-inflected social movement that fought back against the barrier of fear created over the decades of Mubarak's rule. It traces how blogging and social media gave rise to the blogosphere as a public sphere in which this new social movement, comprised primarily of youth, was created, and how they paired this with embodied activism on the streets to create new repertoires of contention. I argue that the movement was thus intimately intertwined with the development of new technologies and forms of communication that changed the nature of political protest in an authoritarian context and challenged the hegemony of the state-dominated media.

The focus on the media is important because the media are a particularly powerful apparatus of control in authoritarian regimes (Gramsci 1992). As Arendt observed, "appearances are realities, and that which does not appear is politically insignificant" (Goldfarb 2006, 14). Information and events do not inherently have political meaning or importance, rather they must be interpreted, framed and contextualized before becoming imbued with significance and import, a process in which gatekeepers such as politicians, journalists, and media owners traditionally

played a central role. Blogs and social media platforms enabled anyone with access to a computer or mobile phone and an Internet connection to become a journalist, editor, producer and publisher and to participate in a new public sphere, in other words, the blogosphere. Nonetheless, as a real social space, there were real power relations and dynamics that mattered, and the link between cyberactivism and street activism was made early on.

A central contention in this dissertation, therefore, is that blogging and social media reconfigure the potentiality for expression and participation, but that it is the particular concatenations of technologically-inflected repertoires of contention that transform potentiality into actuality. I follow Tilly in conceiving of the concept of the repertoire as the set of means a group has for making various and different claims on different groups or individuals, referring to *what* they do as well as *how* they know how to do it (1986, 4). These repertoires exist in dynamic processes made up of recurrent causal mechanisms, which McAdam et. al. define as "delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations" (2001, 24). By analyzing the configurations and sequencing of these mechanisms and the ensuing "alterations in relations among connected elements," this frameworks provides an explanation for why certain outcomes resulted (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 85). This analysis reveals the mechanisms by which the potentiality of the Internet and social media is transformed into concrete instantiations of political struggle through activism, news making practices, and new processes of interaction. This dissertation aims to uncover the specific ways in which new ICTs and social media created configurations and sequencing of mechanisms that enabled a youth-led social movement to become politically consequential in an authoritarian context.

Refuting Technological Determinism and the Formality of Political Inquiry

The initial question guiding my exploratory research during my first trip to the field in 2006 was "What political impact is new media having in Egypt?" My assumption was that I would focus on satellite television and the journalistic field, since Al Jazeera and the burgeoning Arab satellite media industry was the focus of so much attention by scholars, pundits, and journalists alike (Ambrust 2006; El-Nawawy and Iskander 2003; Lamloum 2004; Lynch 2006; Miles 2005; Rushing and Elder 2007; Sakr 1999; Schleifer 2006; Zayani 2005). However, when I showed up at the Press Syndicate on my first day in the field, I found a demonstration underway and met a freelance journalist and blogger named Hossam el-Hamalawy, who introduced me to the nascent Egyptian blogosphere. Two days later I started a blog as a way to document some of my experiences in the field. I used my blog as a way to write fieldnotes in the public sphere and to participate in the Egyptian blogosphere. Having previously worked at the *New York Times* and observed the preoccupation of journalists with blogging and bloggers, I began to wonder if similar dynamics were emerging in Egypt.

As I continued to observe protests, started blogging and began to discover the contours of an Egyptian blogosphere, I increasingly sought to understand from journalists what they thought about blogging and how/whether they incorporated blogs into their journalistic practices. But I kept observing and hearing about protests where young people and bloggers were at the fore. Throughout the summer my question shifted as I decided to expand my thinking of new media to focus on Internet-based media, even though at that time only 12.6 percent of Egyptians used the Internet (ITU Statistics Database). Over the next year-and-a-half I refined my project to focus less on institutional media and more on the Egyptian blogosphere and cyberactivism by bloggers,

remaining engaged in the virtual field of the blogosphere. By the time I returned to the embodied field, from January through June of 2008, I was focused on the question of whether blogging and cyberactivism might have a political impact, and what the proliferation of ICTs in an authoritarian context would mean for this dynamic.

The central questions animating this dissertation, therefore, became the ones outlined above regarding the political impact of blogs and social media in an authoritarian system and whether they facilitate collective action. These questions require some explanation because they are neither technologically deterministic nor focused solely on institutional or formal politics, as mentioned. Indeed, my research follows Bimber's attempt to do away with the unhelpfully ambiguous catchall term "technological determinism" by focusing on the human actions and cultural practices that produce effects as well as the unintended consequences of technological development, in which the "technology is at least partially autonomous" and thus impacts are not solely within in the purview of intentional human action (1994, 85, 98). Indeed many of the debates over whether new ICTs are inherently liberating or whether their use caused the 2011 uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere in the Middle East are too often mired in a superficial debate over technological determinism, which I address in greater detail throughout this chapter.

I propose instead that focusing on the micropolitics of practices and discourse reveals how epistemological and ontological changes take place when a distributional shift in the primary modes of communication occurs because these modes will favor certain species of thought, organization, authority, and truth over others, and thus helps us better understand how ICTs are implicated in processes of political change (Deibert 1997; Jones 1997a; Postman 2006). The ways of knowing, the evaluative means for establishing veracity and authority are different in a communication system that erases the distinction between content production, transmission

and reception and is built as a network. There is no philosopher-king in an era of mass, democratized, open-source knowledge, or Wiki-knowledge. The very nature of authority and mechanisms of establishing trust have shifted shifting as the Internet allows anyone to globally disseminate their views, ranking authority by the number of hits, followers or posts rather than age, academic degree, or institutional position. Although this does not guarantee they will gain an audience, the potentiality is there. In the past, authority in the high-context cultures of the Arab region was based on age, professional accomplishments, and proximity to power, or granted by the media. Government officials and experts who were part of the establishment held a monopoly on authority in the public sphere, while journalists predominately covered official dealings and perspectives. Authority in the blogosphere and on social media is conferred both technologically, through the dynamics of logarithms, and personally, through traditional mechanisms like personal recommendations and mainstream media certification.

Trust in this new media environment no longer requires face-to-face or interpersonal communication. Rather, it is built through online social networks like Facebook and Twitter, where the number of likes, retweets or followers provides a crowdsourced validation or repudiation of one's authority while helping traditionally disenfranchised voices be heard. Such epistemological and ontological changes take place once a distributional shift in the primary modes of communication has taken place, and in turn those who take advantage of these changes are better positioned than those who do not. These distributional shifts can thus help reconfigure power dynamics between the public and authoritarian regimes, and I contend that this new configuration favored blogging as a discursive practice and many-to-many communication rather than one-to-many. Indeed this dissertation responds to the call by Middle East scholars to

"explore the variety of ways in which blogs might transform the dynamics of Arab public opinion and political activism" (Lynch 2007a).

Such an approach focuses on the agency of individuals and collectives, situated within particular technoinstitutional dynamics, because it is through their discourse and practices that changes occur. By focusing on practices and discourse, this research avoids the pitfall, identified by Williams, of making media (or technology more generally) into a cause and all other causes into effects (1992). It contributes to a better understanding for how specific types of ICTs and social media facilitate and circumscribe– rather than determine – certain types of communication, sociopolitical organization and collective action, which in turn enable the development of particular forms of contentious politics and public spheres.

I contend that the proliferation of new ICTs throughout the Arab world reorganized and restructured public communicative space and cultural practices. Much of the research on the Internet and new media in the Middle East has focused too narrowly on assessing its impact on formal political processes or institutions. Thus the debate over whether these new information and communication technologies (ICTs) or "liberation technologies," as Diamond labels them, were inherently democratizing or liberating initially emerged in the field of Middle East studies with the study of pan-Arab satellite TV stations, particularly the Qatari news station Al Jazeera, and its potential to radically change or democratize the political systems of the Arab region (Diamond 2010; El-Nawawy and Iskander 2003; Ibrahim 2004; Khouri 2001; Kraidy 2007; Lamloum 2004; Lynch 2006; Mier 2009; Naomi 2002; Sakr 2001b, 2004; Schleifer 2006; Sreberny 2001; Zayani 2005). Many scholars argued that the advent of pan-Arab stations, whether news, entertainment or religious, enabled the formation of an imagined Arab public and contributed to the development of an Arab public sphere that challenged the traditional

hegemony of the authoritarian state over their mediated national public spheres (Kraidy 2010; Sreberny 2001). As the Internet became more widely available, questions arose about whether an information revolution was underway and what impact this might have on authoritarian regimes in the region (Alterman 1998; Anderson 1999; Ghareeb 2000). Several scholars argued that low Internet penetration rates and high levels of repression in the region meant that the political impact of blogging and Internet connectivity would be limited (Deibert, Palfrey, and Rohozinski 2008b; Kalathil and Boas 2003; Lynch 2006, 50; Morozov 2011). There were those who dismissed the political impact of "new media" even as late as 2010, and as a researcher I faced much skepticism about my choice to focus on bloggers because they represented a very small and particular subset of the population. As Rami Kouri wrote just a few months before the 2011 Arab uprisings: "We must face the fact that all the new media and hundreds of thousands of young bloggers from Morocco to Iran have not triggered a single significant or lasting change in Arab or Iranian political culture. Not a single one. Zero" (2010). Such proclamations, however, discount the micropolitical changes taking place in the every day practices of the younger generation and the empowering impact that practicing and invoking the right to freedom of expression can have. The also ignored the cumulative effect such practices and expectations could have.

Qualitative and ethnographically-informed studies like this one have acknowledged the possibility that the practices and habits developed through the use of new ICTs can result in epistemological changes and reshape the public sphere (Abu-Lughod 2005; Anderson 1999; Deibert 1997; Kraidy 2005, 2010; Lynch 2007a). In this dissertation I contend that the Internet, blogs, social media platforms, and mobile phones were created for communication, and follow O'Reilly's reasoning that "any system designed around communications protocols is intrinsically

designed for participation," and thus I would argue favors those who take advantage of this architecture (O'Reilly 2004). This does not mean that the state or other actors will not attempt to overlay components that restrict participation, meaning that these efforts can become triggers or focal points of contentious politics, as I explain in greater detail in Chapter Three. I will return to this point in the discussion of modified technological determinism.

Background and the Case Study: Egypt's Bloggers and the Tactical Repertoire of Cyberactivism

The generation of Egyptian youth who grew into political consciousness in the early 21st century was born in the 1980s and grew up under Emergency Law, never knowing a president other than Hosni Mubarak. From 1981 until February 11, 2011, Mubarak ruled Egypt as a police state, and thus few of Egypt's youth knew any other ruler. They also came of age amid the Palestinian Intifada, the American-led Iraq war and the so-called "War on Terror." In this highly restrictive political environment, in which the security apparatus was a constant presence, the state dominated the media, and the authoritarian apparatus pervaded all facets of sociopolitical and economic life, there was little tolerance for political dissent and human rights abuses were common. Opportunities for participation in formal politics were limited and the stability and durability of the system was nearly unquestioned by the general population. The political culture reduced "citizens to spectators and ask[ed] them to leave things to their rulers," observed Egyptian political scientist Maye Kassem, characterizing Egypt and the rest of the Arab world as "a political desert with no real political parties, no free press, and few pathways for dissent" (2004, 169). I follow Owen in defining authoritarianism as a system where "power is highly

centralized, pluralism is suspect and where the regime seeks to exercise a monopoly over all legitimate political activity" (1992, 38).

Egyptian youth in the post-millennial era grew up in a security state with restrictions on basic rights and freedoms but also came to political consciousness amid a technological boom that radically altered the flow of information and the public's ability to participate in the public sphere. The median age in Egypt during the time of study was 24, and state-subsidized higher education coupled with state-sponsored ICT development meant that many of these youth were highly educated and technologically savvy, but faced economically frustrating conditions including high unemployment (30%) and a corrupt patronage system (*Global employment trends* 2008; Kassem 2004; Radsch 2011b; Singerman 1995). These youth made up the majority of Internet and social media users during the period of study (it was not until 2011 that users age 40 and up had caught on, becoming the fastest growing segment of Facebook users in Egypt) (Radsch 2011c). This generational divide was even more stark in the blogosphere, where there were few bloggers older than their twenties for the first several years of study. Indeed, there were few mainstream media outlets, local businesses, or government representatives present in this space for the first several years of its existence. Egyptian cyberactivists colonized the Egyptian blogosphere and the government largely abdicated any significant presence in cyberspace for the first decade of the 21st century.

The generational divide in the blogosphere meant that young Egyptians dominated this space, and that many parents were fearful about their sons and daughters blogging. Older people were often hesitant to speak out and felt that there was little they could do to change the situation they were in, whereas the younger Internet-savvy generation felt more empowered to create change. This divide replicated itself in sub national blogospheres, such as that of the Muslim

Brotherhood. The youth of the Muslim Brotherhood were not immune from the lure of new media and the technological leaps others of their generation were experiencing midway through the 2000s. There was no generational gap in grievances, only in responses.

Yet unlike other countries that have experienced one-off moments of contention driven by new media technologies, few of these have developed into a social movement the way it did in Egypt. Cyberactivists, citizen journalists and bloggers all contributed to the revolutionary overthrow of a president who held power for 30 years, but it was a process that occurred over several years before finally culminating in the country-wide protests of early 2011. This dissertation focuses on that process, exploring the causal sequences that resulted in the mobilization of some actors, demobilization of others, and the transformation of one form of action into another (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Indeed scholars have acknowledged that revolutions and massive political disruptions are rarely the result of instantaneous organization or immediate grievances; rather, they typically result from the groundwork laid by activists and grassroots organizers. Indeed, this study explores how youth laid the groundwork for the popular uprisings of 2011.

Pioneering the Cyberactivist Repertoire: The Evolution of Blogs and Social Networking

Egyptian bloggers pioneered many of the tools of the cyberactivist's tactical repertoire, leveraging the unique characteristics of the networked social media platforms and the creativity of a generation of youth with few other outlets for expression. In Egypt, blogs were the primary manifestation of and vehicle for online dissent and citizen journalism, and the blogosphere became an alternative public sphere.

Blogs take many forms, and thus my use of the terms, blog, blogger and blogging encompass the range of social media platforms. Blogs can be deleted but rarely truly erased from

the digital memory of the global network, leaving behind digital detritus from sharing and linking that can, for example, influence search algorithms and technological amplification.[2] Until around late 2007, the term blog most often referred to a reverse chronological diary-like website typically maintained by a single user or small groups of like-minded and ideologically sympathetic individuals, primarily using open-source, web-based platforms like Blogger or Wordpress. Blogging became a suffix attached to a variety of platforms, such a vlogging for video blogging, typically on YouTube, and mlogging for mobile blogging. In 2007, the social networking platforms Facebook and Twitter started to become popular as additional or alternative blogging spaces. For the purpose of this research I include all of these blogging and/or social media platforms in the term blogosphere since, as Benkler observed, "[t]he public sphere function is based on the content and cadence—that is, the use practice—not the technical platform" (2006, 217). Although a few Egyptian bloggers existed in 2002,[3] there were only about 30 to 40 in 2003 and maybe a hundred 2004,[4] it was not until a critical mass of Egyptians started blogging and self-identified as a community that a blogosphere distinct from the more generic virtual community of bloggers worldwide developed. Had such identification never taken place, then no movement would have emerged. For the purpose of my research I defined the Egyptian blogosphere as the Internet community of blogs (broadly conceived) that discussed, analyzed and opined about the physical entity of Egypt and/or the author's identity as an Egyptian, were identified as part of the Egyptian blogosphere by its members, and were maintained by bloggers

[2] The Internet Archive's "Way Back Machine" (Archive.org), which lets users search for previous iterations of a site, and Google's list of cached results, previous results that are provided as a backup in the list of search results.

[3] Amr Gharbeia, for example, started blogging in 2002 and his brother Ahmad in 2003.

[4] Exact numbers are notoriously difficult to specify, but most bloggers interviewed gave these approximate figures.

who were physically located in Egypt at some point while blogging. I delve into this choice and its implications in greater detail in Chapter Two.

The blogosphere emerged in Egypt in 2003 when personal computers were still relatively scarce and there were only about three million Internet users in Egypt. A cohort of youth became early adopters of this new modality of communication – one of which was networked and designed for participation (World Development Indicators 2008). It was that year that blogs written by Iraqis describing the situation on the ground drew international attention and inspired other Arabs to start their own blogs (Abbas 2008; Rainie, Fox, and Fallows 2003; Robison 2005; Wall 2005). The English-language Iraqi blogger Salam Pax published *The Baghdad Blog*, generating a media frenzy over the Iraqi blogger deemed "the Anne Frank" of the conflict by Nick Denton, the founder of the blog collective Gawker Media, in a 20 May 2002 blog post (Pax 2003).[5] Another famous Iraqi war blogger, Riverbend, also attracted extensive coverage in the mainstream global media and even received a book deal (Riverbend 2005). The media's coverage of the famous Iraqi blogs amplified their impact by raising awareness of blogs and the emergent blogging phenomenon in the region, and transcending at least somewhat the digital and linguistic divides of the early 2000s when Internet connectivity was very low and there were no Arabic-language blogging platforms. The fact that these Arab bloggers published books from their blogs provided external certification of these bloggers as influential and important.

Early adopters, whom I term Core bloggers because of their central role throughout the period study, were primarily bi-lingual twenty-somethings, mainly liberal, middle class, and anti-establishment, who used blogs to talk about personal subjects of interest (Radsch 2008a). Many were active participants in the online forums that preceded blogs, but unlike blogs, forums were

[5] http://www.nickdenton.org/archives/005924.html

run by gatekeepers and thus subject to editorial control. These Core bloggers also tended to be relatively open-minded, committed to individual rights and collaboration across political, religious and social divides (Seif El Islam Hamad 2008). "We all come from the middle class, we're not wealthy, we're not rich. We are ordinary guys from the middle class. We are like anyone else, but are different in our minds," explained one such blogger (Mustafa 2008).[6]

Several were self-described techies or "Linux geeks," while others just wanted to "try out" a new publishing medium. Several Core bloggers worked in translation or technology-related jobs, and thus a natural affinity and predisposition toward technology facilitated their adoption of new communication platforms. A few came from activist families, with parents who had forged their lonely ways as human rights activists. Alaa Abdel Fatah's father headed up the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, which became a leading defender of cyberactivists, while Manal Hassan's father, Bahey Eldin Hassan, was the general director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. Nawara Negm's father was a leftist revolutionary poet and her mother a journalist. The majority of early blogs were initially in English, although there were also several blogs in Arabic, which had implications that I will discuss in greater detail throughout the dissertation.[7] These young, early adopters played a significant role in the diffusion of blogging and amplification of cyberactivism, which made this group particularly influential in constructing the blogosphere as a realm of contention, as I will explain in greater detail.

Technological developments and ever-increasing levels of Internet and mobile phone penetration were particularly influential in shaping the dynamics of the Egyptian blogosphere as

[6] I have used as much identifying information as permitted by the individual informant, who specified during the interview what level of anonymity or not they wanted. In general, most people wanted to be identified by their full names, although in some cases they preferred first names only or the use of the blogging pseudonym.

[7] The precise figure is unknown but several of the earliest and Core bloggers interviewed described the blogosphere in Egypt as predominantly English at the outset, a finding supported by my analysis of blog creation dates, Technorati statistics and blog content analysis.

it transitioned from one found primarily on blogging services like Blogger, Wordpress and YouTube, to a move diverse array of platforms, most significantly Facebook and Twitter. Social media use in the MENA region expanded exponentially with the introduction of Facebook, which Egyptian cyberactivists immediately adapted for political activism, but which also inspired a new cohort of youth to become active online.

As blogging was adapted to and integrated within these new platforms, so, too, were the techniques and strategies comprising the cyberactivist's repertoire of contention. Although official connectivity remained low at about 12 percent by the time these new platforms were becoming popular Internet access was widely available and inexpensive for students and youth in major cities, according to those interviewed (ICT statistics database). Anyone who wanted to could relatively easily blog or Facebook, even in the poorer and less cosmopolitan areas of Upper Egypt. The prices for Internet access were not necessarily a barrier to participation, as cyberactivist Malek Mustafa noted:

> It's huge now [2008]… I'm thinking of a guy in Minya, for example, with no talent, no money, no connections, who becomes a journalist. He has no interest in being a journalist, but he wants to talk. He can go to any cyber café and an hour is one Egyptian lira or half a lira ($0.10-.20), and he can have cable in his house – illegal cable— for 20 lira per month ($4). So it's not a big cost, and he can talk and he can do anything he wants. (Mustafa 2008)

These new social media platforms that emerged in the latter part of the decade provided more diverse options for blogging, providing outlets for expressing oneself and connecting with others online that would automatically broadcast to a person's social network and through the networks of those friends, in a cascading flow of information that was connected to one's real identity. Egyptian cyberactivists propelled the expansion of blogging into new social media

platforms and were early also adopters of Twitter and Facebook, which caught on more quickly among youth more generally.

Facebook

Facebook spurred many more Egyptians to communicate and engage online without the dedication required to maintain a blog. In 2007, there were three million people in the Egypt network, although unlike blog profiles that list a blogger's hometown, people can belong to multiple Facebook networks, meaning this figure likely included many Diaspora and expats (Hassan 2008). I conceptualize posting and engaging on Facebook as a form of blogging because it involved posting short updates and thoughts, sharing links and photos, and commenting on other's posts, all in a reverse chronological order. There were also key differences between platforms: Facebook is a quasi-private network whereas blogging was very much about participating in the public sphere. The ethos of Facebook in some ways went against that of blogging because it was not as unfiltered and open, although my experience indicated that few Egyptians used security settings to limit who could see and interact with their profile (at least during the research period) so it functioned in much the same way as the blogosphere and in fact was seen as an extension in many respects of the blogosphere. Mustafa explained in an interview:

> The difference with Facebook is that they have an administrator and anytime they can delete your account, but in blogs anyone can read what you are writing, so the blogosphere is open whereas Facebook is closed. I have account on Facebook, but I don't like it, it's closed, no one can see it without approval, if we are friends… but it's closed.

He opined that nothing would *replace* the blog since this was the primary mechanism by which the public at large could happen across a blog and find out more, and enabled longer-form narrative engagement as well as searchable archiving, which Facebook did not.

Indeed the open nature of the blogosphere contributed to its scale-free growth in which key, highly connected early adopters remained influential nodes. But the growth of Facebook also occurred dramatically because each user leveraged the power of their own social networks, and it was a somewhat more private way of organizing and mobilizing collective action. *Egypt Today* dubbed 2007 as the "year of Facebook," although it called the social network a fad and contrasted it with blogging, noting that "the blogging scene has apparently picked up where Facebook left off" (Hassan 2008). Similarly, blogger Zeinobia noted in a comment on her blog: "I think blogging is a better way to speak our minds without being editted (*sic*) by anyone."[8]

While labeling Facebook a fad may have been short-sited given its growth and its critical role as an organizing and communication platform throughout the next several years, such comments underscored that bloggers were among the early adopters of this new platform. In March 2009, Facebook launched an Arabic version and by early 2010, it was the second most popular site in Egypt (after Google) with 2.4 million users, with the most traffic to the site of any Arab country and the 23rd highest globally (Zaghloul 2010). Once again, Egyptian cyberactivists appropriated a platform that had started off as a way to stay connected with college friends (and to find dates, according to the quasi-biographical film about founder Mark Zuckerberg, *The Social Network*) to their political purposes. The April 6, 2008 Facebook Strike, which called for collective action in support of a planned labor strike and triggered several arrests of cyberactivists, was a case in point, and I discuss in Chapter Five.

[8] http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2007/10/real-facebook-groups.html

Twitter

In March 2006 the microblog Twitter was created, allowing people to compose 140 character messages called tweets via the Internet or mobile phone that would then be broadcast to their followers. Available only in English at first, Twitter really did not start gaining popularity in the Middle East until 2008, when tech savvy youth and cyberactivists started incorporating into their repertoires of contention. These early adopters tweeted mainly in English, not Arabic (99% in English, 26% in Arabic), were largely male (twice as many men as women tweeted in mid-2009), and interacted primarily with bloggers, with more than 80 percent using Twitter to find news and stay updated, according to March 2009 estimates (Malin 2009). Even midway through 2009 Twitter was still a "new phenomenon" for most Egyptians.[9] The same survey indicated there were only about 3,000 Twitter users in the Middle East at that time, with that number growing to around 40,000 by mid-2010 (Malin 2010b). Nine percent of MENA Internet users said in a 2010 survey that they used Twitter, with Egyptians representing 13 percent of the region's users, the second highest usage after the expatriate-filled UAE (Malin 2009, 2010a). Despite the small number of users, particularly as a percentage of the population, they were nonetheless at the vanguard of creating new and innovative uses for the service and incorporating into contentious repertoires.

Originally envisioned as a way for individuals to use SMS messages to communicate with a small group, Egyptians adapted it to their context and it quickly became a popular platform for cyberactivists. Twitter became one of the most important tools in their repertoire of contention, useful for amplifying their messages, framing their grievances and demands, and organizing social protest. Conversations on a particular topic are organized through the use of

[9] http://www.scene-heard.com/post/2009/04/19/Twitter-war.aspx

'hashtags.' Hashtags are searchable and the top ten hashtags globally are featured on a side bar. Becoming a trending topic became a key goal in the cyberactivist strategy, since it could trigger amplification and result in news coverage, favorable framing and greater attention by key external actors, all key strategic goals for activists. Activists in the region explicitly stated this goal, and the accounts of elite media and journalists who follow them on Twitter bear this out, as I discuss in greater detail throughout. From the beginning, Twitter was largely used in Egypt and the broader Middle East to communicate with journalists, perhaps explaining the fact that most users tweeted in English;[10] the same 2009 survey found that nearly 60 percent of respondents said they interacted most often with media and journalists, coming in just after friends at 70 percent, a statistic with important implications for the activation of key mechanisms and for triggering the circular circulation of information, as I discuss in the following chapters (Malin 2009). Cyberactivists also used Twitter to strengthen their networked links with each other, journalists and transnational rights groups, providing a measure of protection and publicity when the regime attempted to arrest or harass them.

In 2008, for example, an activist in Egypt "tweeted" himself out of jail following his arrest during the strike that marked the birth of the April 6 movement. The American graduate student was in Mahalla with several Egyptian cyberactivists and was taken by police, but managed to send the tweet *Arrested* via his mobile phone before being hauled off to jail. Because his followers included several of Egypt's leading digital dissidents, they transmitted his tweet through their networks of domestic and foreign journalists, amplifying his predicament and prompting worldwide coverage of his brief detention and framing the event as a moment of cyberactivism in which David stood up to Goliath (the Egyptian authorities) (Phillips 2008;

[10] Part of this linguistic choice may be the fact that the Twitter platform was only available in English at that time.

Simon 2008). As Twitter evolved to handle photos, it became an even more powerful way for cyberactivists to ensure their messages and documentation of abuses got out, because there would be no way to staunch the flow of messages short of shutting down the mobile phone network. Twitter is harder to block than other Internet sites because it can be accessed via clients as well as directly through the site.

Egyptian cyberactivists provided inspiration to the rest of the region and activists around the world, pioneering many of the tactics that Iranian youth protesting flawed elections in 2009 used to communicate with foreign journalists and bypass censorship of the Internet and SMS messages. It was deemed as such a powerful communication and organization tool that the US government intervened to ask Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance that would have taken the site offline temporarily; Twitter agreed to postpone what it called a "critical network upgrade" because of "the role Twitter is currently playing as an important communication tool in Iran" (Radsch 2009b).

Blogging and social networking are paradigmatic example of a mode of communication favored by the dominant medium of the post-millennial period – the Internet. There are at once mass media and intensely personal. They do not fit easily into pre-existing categories of personal versus mass communication technologies since they combine many aspects of each. Theories like Hall's encoding/decoding framework that distinguish between discrete phases in the communication process loose some of their explanatory power if these positions merge or become blurred, again underscoring the need for new theorizing in a new communication environment (1980b). Blogs and social media platforms are personalized, self-managed, reverse-chronological, interconnected, dialogic blends of print, image, video, audio, and hyperlinks. McLuhan may have asserted that "print makes everyone a reader, and Xerox makes everyone a

publisher" (McLuhan 1977, 178). But as I explain throughout this dissertation, blogs made everyone a publisher and a distributor at no costs and with near infinite reach.

Of course just because a work is published does not mean it will be read, watched or listened to. This depends on the architecture and power laws of digital communication networks and algorithmic design, as I discuss in further detail later in this chapter. Some have argued that the prevalence of personal blogs and other online texts primarily written or created for oneself and self-published has elevated self-communication to the extent that it has become one of the primary forms in the public sphere through most of the 2000s, what Castells calls "electronic autism" (2007). In the same vein, researchers in politically polarized democracies the likeminded converse with each other online and consume blogs, turning the blogosphere in an echo-chamber and creating information cocoons (Gilbert, Bergstrom, and Karahalios 2009; Sunstein 2006; Sunstein 2008). But these observations were not present in Egypt during the period of study. They emerged from observations based in Western contexts where blogging had different normative rules and the political system was very different in Egypt.

Furthermore, although algorithmic personalization and collaborative filtering, such as recommendations about which content you might like based on your previous consumption patterns, may contribute to this trend, these algorithms were less pervasive when this study began. Moreover, social networking sites have swung to the opposite side of the spectrum from autism because they involve pervasive communication and interaction with "friends" and the management of public appearance. Furthermore, even self-communication can be politically consequential when it expresses the hopes and dreams of that individual to live in a free society, the belief that such dreams have potentiality, and questions the necessity of a given order or reality. Such musings impact the individual but are also self-communications available for all to

see. As Goldfarb wrote about pre-revolutionary Poland: "When people act as if they live in a free society, when they express to each other the conviction that they are free and together create the bonds of a free social order, they will, if their actions persist, create freedom" (2006, 132). Actions, words and the way people use ICTs, not technology itself, create freedom.

Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Apparatus

Throughout this dissertation I seek to unearth the complicity between communication technology, sociopolitical structures and imagination. This section outlines key concepts and theoretical frameworks that I draw on to do so. The "micro-processes of identity formation and macro-processes of collective identity formation" are both implicated in the complex process of movement formation and political change, and thus I focus on both technoinstitutional dynamics and the phenomenological lifeworlds of activists. In doing so I position this dissertation within the wider literature on technology and political change.

This dissertation seeks to advance the understanding of how ICTs and social media enable contentious politics and are implicated in process of political change by establishing a framework for analyzing three interconnected issues:

1) **Enabling expressive potential**: blogging provided uncensored, unfiltered, networked platforms that facilitated free expression. Blogging, in particular, habituated young Egyptians to regularly expressing themselves freely, and thus to a change in expectations and imagination.
2) **Generating new public spheres**: In Egypt the blogosphere became an alternative public sphere, and created new avenues of participation in politics and the media

3) **Contentious politics:** The development of a youth-based social movement

This framework builds on the concepts of micropolitics and repertoires of contention, introduced above, as well as public spheres and fields of practice. In the following section I introduce the theoretical apparatus, drawn from social movement/contentious politics analysis and social constructivism and offer a definition conceptualization of cyberactivism within this framework. I also address the debate around technological determinism and liberation technologies, and how my approach avoids the pitfalls of the former without acceding to the hyperbole of the later by returning full circle to explain the nature of networked communication technologies and propose a constructivist account of why technology matters with respect to dominant modes of communication.

Social Movement

While there are many definitions of what constitutes a social movement, they typically involve notions of solidarity and collectivity, conflict or interaction with authorities or elites, and claims making. Tarrow, for example, defines a social movement as "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (1998). Goldstone, on the other hand, has suggested that social movements should be seen as part of institutionalized politics and not simply as forms of protest, and highlights the complimentarity of protest and political action along with the complexity of a group's integration into institutionalized politics (2003, 7, 9). I follow the former approach, since youth had such limited opportunities for participation in institutionalized politics, and in authoritarian states like Egypt it seems to provide limited explanatory power. Furthermore, Tarrow's focus on collective challenges rather than simply conflict underscores the role that time plays in the dynamics of a

social movement development. Drawing on Tarrow's definition, I propose that the cyberactivism of young Egyptians can be conceptualized as a new type of technologically inflective social movement that was shaped by the structural context in which it developed both politically and technologically.

Indeed my approach emphasizes the relational aspect of social movements and social networks in the study of collective action and contentious politics by focusing on both individual participation and institutional dynamics, thus responding to the call for greater focus on *how* networks matter (Diani and McAdam 2003). McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow (2001) define contentious politics as "episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects" that involve the government as "mediator, target or claimant," is recognized as bearing on the interests of others and would, if successful, effect claimant interests.

Recognizing the utility of focusing on these interactions, I examine several episodes of contention throughout the dissertation, but I argue that this it is not sufficient to explore only moments of interaction, because this does not explain how these "maker of claims" came to identify themselves as such and the consensus building around their claims. This is of particular interest in the new communications environment of the post-millennial period, and thus I also focus on the phenomenological lifeworlds of these cyberactivists to show how networked social media gave opposition and subaltern groups, such as liberal secularists or the Muslim Brotherhood, new tools for individual and collective identity creation and enabled freedom of expression and opinion, which resulted in important changes in expectations and imagination. These technologies also facilitated organization, mobilization and advocacy, and enabled collectives to form spontaneously and with far fewer organizations and logistical barriers,

rendering the dynamics of contentious politics in this case distinctive from other revolutionary periods.

In the literature on collective action, particularly from the perspective of social movement theory, three interrelated factors can be used to explain a movement's emergence, development and outcomes: mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and processes (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). New ICTs reconfigured these structures and processes in fundamental ways. They reduce the barriers to collective action, create new opportunity structures, and enable the development of new tactical repertoires. Garrett (2006, 204) identified three mechanisms in the literature on ICTs' influence on social movements that "potentially link technology and participation: reduction of participation costs, promotion of collective identity and creation of community." Although understanding the availability of resources, political opportunity structures, and the social construction of grievances by social movements continue to be important aspects for understanding movement success or failure, I contend that technological opportunity structures and the culture of a movement are also key explanatory factors that need to be taken into account, as well as how an individual comes to identify as part of a collective. Ultimately it is the constellation of these dynamics and the sequencing of mechanisms that best explain how and why a movement succeeds or not.

The observation that repertoires of contention change slowly, constrained by structural factors such as economics and culture, is no longer the case given the speed of technology and communication (Tarrow 1997). The repertoires of contention comprising cyberactivism in Egypt developed and adapted very quickly, constrained less by structural factors such as economics and distance, which the properties of ICTs help overcome, than they would have been in the past. The speed of technological change reflects the speed at which information flows occur in the

blogosphere, where economics exerted less of a constraining influence on the development and adaptation of contentious actions because of reduced communication and transaction costs along with exponentially decreasing costs of technology and access. For example, Twitter launched in the summer of 2006 and by early 2007 Egyptian bloggers were starting to use it while by 2008 they had integrated Twitter as a key tool for triggering amplification through the mainstream media by focusing on including journalists in their Twitter networks, using hashtags to organize and amplify a campaign or slogan, and enabling real-time mobilization, organization and documentation by activating the SMS function to enable tweeting from mobile phones. By 2009, Twitter was an essential part of the cyberactivist repertoire even as new strategies were developed and adapted to the specifics of the platform, such as hashtag bombing and live tweeting, which I will describe in greater detail in a subsequent section of the dissertation. Adapting and adopting new ICTs quickly was a critical factor to the success of cyberactivist strategies, because newness was an opportunity.

The activist bloggers who helped create and shape the blogosphere as a realm of contentious politics comprised a movement that transcended the "virtual" world to stake claims in the "real" world through the development of new repertoires of contention, specifically cyberactivism and citizen journalism. The new repertoires that young bloggers and cyberactivists deployed helped to create a new type of political movement that reshaped the public sphere and created new possibilities in the minds of the citizenry. This dissertation follows Tilly in conceiving of the concept of the repertoire as the set of means a group has for making various and different claims on different groups or individuals, referring to *what* they do as well as *how* they know how to do it (Tilly 1986, 4). I propose that young Egyptian activists developed two key repertoires, cyberactivism and citizen journalism. These repertoires consisted of specific

mechanisms that, when activated successfully and in particular sequences, turned potentiality into actuality.

Mechanisms

The Egyptian blogosphere emerged in 2004 and during the period of study there were several key episodes of contention that shaped the evolution of cyberactivists into a movement for change. Particular configurations of mechanisms were significant in explaining the outcomes of these episodes. By analyzing the recurrent mechanisms that occurred during these episodes, in other words the "unique sequence of alterations in relations among connected elements," this dissertation provides an explanation for why certain outcomes resulted (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 85). These episodes, in which political movements and/or groups mobilized to make demands on the state, reveal the mechanisms by which the potentiality of new ICTs power was transformed into concrete instantiations of political struggle through activism, news making practices, and cross-ideological interaction. The Egyptian blogosphere has been a locus of political activity, with far more blogs writing about politics and bloggers being involved in politics than any other Arab country, and the extension of this focus into social networking forums like Facebook and Twitter (Radsch 2011b).

There are several identifiable mechanisms that explain how the confluence of the right technology used in the right ways at the right times and in the right sequence resulted in a particular outcome. The concomitant power of new, networked digital technologies coupled with mechanistic sequencing enabled cyberactivists in Egypt to challenge the status quo, both in the public sphere writ large as well as in sub-communities like the Muslim Brotherhood. This research identified six primary mechanisms or pairs of mechanisms that were activated and

combined in various ways to produce particular outcomes, and as the community expanded, the mechanisms in some cases became self-reinforcing whereas in other cases they were adapted to a bigger and more diverse community as the blogosphere grew and new social networks emerged.

These six mechanisms are:

1. *isnad* and peer-to-peer sharing;
2. *asabiyah* and *ijma'*;
3. amplification and agenda-setting;
4. framing;
5. certification/de-certification;
6. the generational divide

I use these Arabic terms because they are situated in the culture under study and encompass ideas that could be conceived of as democratic, but which do not carry the same baggage that Western terms have taken on in the post-September11 era. Furthermore, they belie the all-too-common claim that Arabs or Muslims are somehow incapable or inhospitable to democratic practices. Three of them are drawn from Quranic concepts of communication that I contend were adapted through online practices of interpretive and communicative actions, typically reserved for the official representatives of Islam in the *ulema* or the elder leaders of the Brotherhood, for example. By using these terms I do not seek to draw precise parallels with Quranic study, but rather to underscore that many of the technologically-inflected practices that developed through cyberactivism and blogging have democratic nuances that can be traced back to Arab and

Muslim culture and not just Western Enlightenment. Indeed these terms encompass particular nuances that offer greater explanatory power, as I will explain here.

The Arabic term *isnad* is derived from the verb that means to support and refers to the methodology of Islamic science in which the sayings of the prophet (*Hadith*) are traced through authoritative sources in an unbroken chain of witness in order to verify its authenticity and credibility (Fandy 2000; Schooley 1994, 651). The process establishes a discourse network that is stratified and elevates some scholars over others based on reliability and credibility. Isnad is a communicative method of establishing authority, and represents a cultural way of knowing and establishing truth. Fandy argues that this practice "shapes the cosmology of the larger society with regards to trust" and verification (2000, 383). I conceptualize virtual isnad as an extension of this communication method adapted to account for communication practices and authority patterns in the new ICT environment. Although the term isnad refers to a culturally-specific way of witnessing and documenting, virtual isnad via online platforms is a strategy used to establish authenticity and authority that cyberactivists appropriated and reinterpreted in the cybersphere.

Virtual isnad refers to the tracing of witness or practice of establishing authenticity through digital networked media. Isnad can be performed via trackbacks, tweets, and social bookmarking and most importantly by hyperlinking authoritative accounts to one's own. Just as the scholars whose interpretations of Islamist jurisprudence formed the *sunnah,* authority in the digital realm is established through the number of page views, the pervasiveness of links to a site, the quantity of re-tweeted tweets on Twitter, sharing or liking something on Facebook or via social bookmarking sites, and the type and number of comments, as well as the authority of a particular blogger. The Core bloggers, who I discuss later, became the nodes where these veracity chains traversed. The culture of the Egyptian blogosphere was constructed through peer-

to-peer sharing, and the circulation of videos and images was a particularly important way of participating in and being part of the culture. Isnad became a key mechanism in framing contests and amplification. Furthermore, isnad is both real-time *and* archival, seen in both the circulation of images and videos, for example, as well as in the residual digital detritus that is left behind by this circulation.

Asabiyah refers to the idea of a collective community identity and refers to the development of social solidarity in which the individual identity is subsumed to that of the group, reinforced by religion or other collective normative commitments, which becomes a motor for change. The term asabiyah originated with Ibn Khaldun, a 14th century Tunisian Muslim sociologist, in his study of Arab history and socioeconomics and refrains of this idea are found in Durkheim's work on the collective conscience and in contemporary works on identity. The insights that Khaldun's formulation provides into society and the state, and their relations to the rise and decline of ruling orders, emerged from the study of Arab cultures, as did this research, and thus seems a more fitting conceptual device than those developed during the Enlightenment in Europe. Khaldun applied this idea of unity based on social and psychological bonds to measure "the strength and stability of social groupings" and the devotion of an individual to a group. I contend that asabiyah is also a process by which routine interaction can be transformed into contentious action and potentially mobilization. I conceptualize virtual *ijma'* (to agree, to determine) as the consensus building process around the values and constitutive rules of the virtual public sphere. Ijma' is a terms found in Islamic communication science to refer to the debate and resulting consensus of Islamic scholars, and can also be interpreted to refer to consensus reached by the broader community through *itjihad*, or independent reasoning, that establishes what is correct and obligatory (Kabbani undated). In the blogosphere this meant

consensus building around the constitutive and normative rules of blogging, such as individualism and free expression. According to Ibn Taymiyya, "the *ijma'* to which there is to be meticulous adherence is what the first pious generations … agreed upon, for after them divergences became numerous and the Community became spread out" (Kabbani undated). Similarly, my conceptualization of ijma' in the digital realm and with respect to cyberactivism includes a component of timing (with respect to the generational element), thus linking it to the sixth mechanism: the generational divide. While meticulous adherence is too strong a term, the first generation of Core bloggers were free expression purists in many ways, defending the right of bloggers to express highly unpopular opinions, use curse words, and write in colloquial Egyptian Arabic. The continued influence of the first generations is evident in the blogosphere, as I will show throughout the following chapters, making this concept is flexible enough to account for change and configurational differentiations as a given community grows, whereas the English term consensus building lacks such nuance and temporal dimensions.

Ijma' thus becomes a process by which mutual interests and shared identities can be constructed and discovered in the process of creating asabiyah. Therefore I argue that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between these two mechanisms, each of which is strengthened and reinforced by the other. Such a conceptualization also helps us better understand why some ijma' processes become particularly powerful as well as how and why asabiyah weakens or even disappears when ijma' fails to occur and vice versa.

For Khaldun, the consciousness of a collective rises spontaneously in small kinship (or equivalent) groups, and can be deepened and strengthened by a religious ideology, and then expanded through citizenship. Understanding the role of asabiyah as a mechanism through which collective identity is constructed and maintained explains how the formation of identity in the

blogosphere occurred without being restricted by territorial boundaries or physical interaction. It is also a mechanism through which the boundaries of a field are identified and identifiable, and thus the values, principles of qualification, and normative claims through which internal legitimacy are derived. Thinking of virtual asabiyah in this way enables us to understand how young Egyptians came to see themselves as a community and construct join grievances through the construction of a "virtual" public sphere in which free expression and social justice values were dominant. It also offers an explanation for how young people who seemed woefully unmatched against a repressive state nonetheless mobilized collective action for political reform and undermined the hegemony of the state-run media.

Similarly, amplification and agenda-setting go hand-in-hand since agenda setting is a form of amplification and applies primarily to the mainstream media and public policy. But I conceive of amplification as more dynamic than just agenda setting in that it can occur at the technological level as well. The technological characteristics of networks defined by power laws and the algorithms designed by search engines and social network platforms mean that amplification occurs because of the choices made by third-party software engines, and that gaming these technologies can then become a particular strategy in a given campaign.

I propose the concept of technological amplification as an independent and non-controllable mechanism inherent in the algorithms of Internet search engines and collaborative filtering technology. Collaborative filtering refers to "the process of filtering for information or patterns using techniques involving collaboration among multiple agents, viewpoints, data sources, etc." such as recommendations made on Amazon.com about what book to buy or on Blogger about which blog you might like.[11] The auto-suggestion and toolbar features in search

[11] Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative_filtering. Accessed 1 October 2010.

engines and web browsers, search algorithms, and collaborative filtering suggestions are all a form of technological amplification. Amplification in the mainstream media, particularly leading Western media, also positively impacts technological amplification. The reason for this is that during the period of study, all major Western media outlets, and increasing numbers of Arab media outlets, had web-based versions that were archived and accessible online. Because of the circular circulation of information, in which stories from mainstream media and news wires like Associated Press and Reuters are republished in other media, which also have websites, and blogs or other citizen-created content, and high authority rankings for these leading media outlets, information published on those sites is redistributed and re-amplified, which then feeds back into the algorithms of search and collaborative filtering platforms. Technological amplification is thus also a form of technological agenda-setting, since those blog posts that are more often linked to and bloggers who appear in mainstream media are also going to show up higher in search lists, recommendations and auto-fill. The dual-pronged nature of amplification makes triggering information cascades far easier, but also increases the amount of information in the blogosphere and cyberspace more broadly. This means that framing and certification become critical complementary mechanisms because can make some information rise above all the other "noise" in the blogosphere and become relevant in a given public sphere.

Related to, but distinct from, agenda-setting is framing, a mechanism that projects power by not only by getting an issue on the public agenda, but also about ensuring that issue is portrayed in a particular way. Information and events do not inherently have political meaning or importance, but rather must be interpreted, framed and contextualized before becoming imbued with significance and import, a process in which gatekeepers in the Fourth Estate, such as producers and journalists, traditionally played a central role. Blogs and online media did away

with the gatekeepers and structural asymmetries that prevented subaltern voices from gaining access to the mainstream media. Framing involves interactive construction of disputes between many actors in which cultural and technological resources constrain and shape deliberate framing efforts, which result in framing contests (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 44). Framing contests occur not only with the state and in the media but also within communities, where successful mobilizing frames emerge out of ijma' and asabiyah. Framing contests may also be struggles to define who has the ability to certify.

An emerging literature based on studies of the American blogosphere contends that the blogosphere has become a site of political contention where bloggers deploy strategies of de-legitimation and contest the status quo (Drenzer and Farrell ; Hall). In a U.S.-based study, Drenzer and Farrell found that the social construction of an agenda or interpretive frame by blogs could become a focal point for the mainstream media and help shape the larger debate, especially given their comparative advantage of being able to publish quickly, which gave them a "first-mover advantage" (Drenzer and Farrell 2004). This dissertation contributes to a better understanding of how these dynamics work in countries where the mainstream media are not free but rather dominated by a repressive state and provides new empirical evidence for how blogs and citizen journalism influence agenda setting and framing processes.

Finally, certification and its converse, de-certification, were critical mechanisms that helped create new political actors and "articulate and shape public reaction" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 113). Certification refers to "the validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by external authorities" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 121). Inherent in this definition, I would argue, is the idea that the external authority must possess some form of capital, whether cultural, political, economic or symbolic, that they leverage in order to enact

certification. The media are routinely implicated in certification and decertification, as are non-governmental rights organizations such as Amnesty International or Reporters Sans Frontières, although some have more "consecrating power" – to use Bourdieu's term—than others (Benson and Neveu 2005a). In the journalistic field, for example, there are prizes and awards for good journalism, which are forms of cultural capital that certifies someone as a good journalist or a topic as worthy of journalistic attention. I therefore propose conceptualizing certification as a transfer of symbolic capital. When, for example, journalists or NGOs classify a blogger as a citizen journalist or a human rights defender, they are certifying that blogger as being a member of that group or field, which in turn endows the blogger with symbolic capital that enables that person, and even potentially that group, to then enact certification. The cumulative effect can result in what I call a certification cascade, building upon the idea of informational cascades developed in social movement theory.

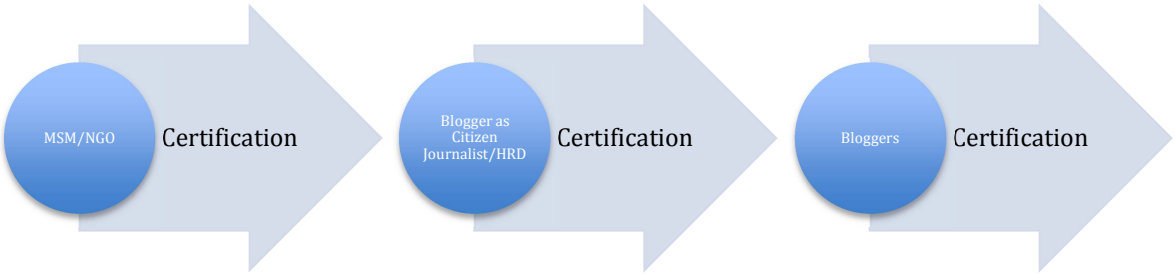

Figure 1 Certification cascade

I expand on this conception of certification to include technological certification, that is, when the underlying algorithms and coding online make things visible and findable online. Technological certification is possible because the dynamics of power laws in networks like the blogosphere and the particularities of algorithms that give rise to search results,

recommendations and suggestions online are independent of an external authority and dependent on the underlying code of a given platform. Thus a Google algorithm that results in a blog post showing up at the top of a list of search results, or the algorithms of social networks that suggest who to follow, or recommend content you might like, are the results of technological certification. The logic behind the conceptualization is that when a particular blog post shows up at the top of search results, it indicates a high level of authority created through the public's collective interaction with it, meaning if that post is viewed, shared, linked to, reposted, liked, tweeted, etc., these individual interaction coalesce in a sort of democratic popularity contest that is filtered through the algorithm. Technological certification is largely independent of agentic actions by external authorities (although gaming the algorithm is part of the cyberactivist repertoire) and thus does not require any particular capital to work, it is inherent in the networked platform.

I also expand on the concept of certification by external authorities to include certification by a given asabiyah community, since in many cases informants made explicit choices about their online identity, anonymity, and practices and values that would give them access to validation by the community. The concept of internal community certification became evident during the period of study and sheds light on a particular dynamic of the Egyptian blogosphere in which community certification and decertification were important to collective action, and help explain why there were so few pro-government or NDP bloggers.

The generational divide is more of a cognitive mechanism as it refers to the idea of age and/or experience differences and by implication distinctive mindsets or aptitudes that influence or alter perception (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 26; Diebert 1997). As Deibert observed, specific social epistemology will have a better chance of surviving and flourishing in particular

communication environments and that these processes are largely intergenerational (1997, 277). With respect to age, this can be seen in the different technological and social networking aptitudes of older and younger people and the likelihood of integrating these practices into daily life or social relations. It can also be observed political movements, for examples age difference between an organization's leadership and its adherents, but also with respect to earlier supporters and those who join later. In the blogosphere, for example, the early adopters and Core bloggers comprised the first generation of the Egyptian blogosphere, and their values and norms can be distinguished from later generations that included a broader array of users and different levels of familiarity with technology, etc.

Throughout the following chapters I explain how particular sequences of these mechanisms explain the trajectory of particular contentious episodes, some of which successfully challenged state dominance and hegemony and others that failed to have the desired impact. Certification and amplification, for example, activate potentiality, while asabiyah and itjihad reinforce it. Khaldun observed that the importance of imaginary psychological factors become more important than numerical or weapons superiority in winning a war, and I extend this observation to explain how the concatenation of the mechanisms outlined above could change the calculus of repression and put constraints on the use of force by the state-security apparatus during episodes of political contestation. Thinking in terms of these particular mechanisms is important for understanding particular claims making practices as well as how particular technologies provided potentiality that, when utilized or enacted, lead to a trajectory that can lead to path-dependency.

Cyberactivism

I define cyberactivism as the integrated use of the Internet and networked digital technologies to further a cause. This form of activism is distinct in that it leverages the networked properties of the Internet and social media, the ubiquity and portability of mobile telephony and Internet connections, and the creative potential of web-based media and digital tools. Unlike the term virtual activism, which implies that such activism is not embodied or exists in a ream distinct from the real, the prefix cyber refers to information technology and computerization without situating the activity outside of reality. Howard's definition of cyberactivism as "the act of using the Internet to advance a political cause that is difficult to advance offline" is problematic because in many cases traditional activism and cyberactivism are inseparable, and the offline and the online are simply various modes in the process of advancing a singular cause (2011, 145). Similarly, Vegh's definition of "online activism as a politically motivated movement relying on the Internet" is problematic because of the dependency implied by the use of the verb 'rely' as well as the singular focus on the political (2003, 72). Including political in these definitions negates other motivating causes that could be economic, environmental, or religious, for example. In Chapter Six, for example, I analyze a subset of the youth movement, the Muslim Brotherhood bloggers, and how they deploy cyberactivism to challenge internal political and religious orthodoxies.

The juxtaposition of traditional activism and cyberactivism proposes a false dichotomy between the two, however, since contemporary activism that does not make use of digital tools is becoming increasingly rare. The rarity stems from the fact that the Internet and mobiles phones are becoming the dominant modes of communication. The term cyberactivism and my definition are an attempt to acknowledge that bloggers and online activists pioneered specific strategies,

colonized particular platforms, and incorporated them in novel ways to further their cause. The period of study, 2006 through 2010, was a dynamic time during which the dominance of analog, broadcast media was in decline and digital, networked media was taking its place, meaning that cyberactivism was an emerging phenomenon distinct from traditional activism, but in turn has helped redefine what activism could be.

The term cyberactivism signifies the centrality of new ICTs in the interplay between the physical and digital realms in which activists are situated and where activism takes place. Street activism, for example, can be specifically aimed at creating a spectacle that can be recorded and posted online, with the aim of spurring people to share via social networks and broaden the dissemination of an act of political or social protest. And cyberactivism is often designed to get people into the streets.

Most definitions and analyses of cyberactivism, online or Internet activism, or digital activism focus on the forms, tactics and results of such activism. Vegh, for example, divides tactics into three categories: awareness/advocacy, organization/mobilization, action/reaction (2003). While this heuristic is largely accurate in describing the objectives or results of such activism, it ignores how the technology itself plays an autonomous role in ICT-mediated techniques because of the inherent properties of online networks and automated algorithmic designs. Furthermore, the size, scale and ubiquity of the Internet makes it fundamentally distinct from other media and enabled social movement formation to occur in novel ways and at unheard of speeds. Shirky argues that the ease of self-assembling into groups to cooperate and take collective action is easier, cheaper and possible on a larger scale than ever before because social tools have removed the "two old obstacles" to collective action, namely "locality of information, and barriers to group reaction" (2008, 21, 153). As the following chapters detail, the collective

action frames that developed between 2004 and 2010 evolved from limited demands for constitutional reform and judicial independence to full-scale rejection of the political system and demands for the ouster of President Mubarak. These collective action frames emerged from a dialectical process of authentification, to use Cox's term, that occurred through internal debate and struggle over change (2002).

Yet this frame had to resonate with a broader public to draw them into the streets despite pervasive feelings of hopelessness and fear that characterized the Egyptian public during this time.[12] Thus amplification and certification mechanisms had to be activated and transcend the individual. Cyberactivists and bloggers envisioned a different Egypt and helped reconfigure the imaginations of a new generation of youth. The Internet and social media networks were central to articulating and enabling this reconfiguration, and thus one must account for their technological dynamics and the role of technology in the epistemological changes that took place and contributed to the success of the Egyptian youth movement.

Social Constructivism and the Role of Dominant Communication Forms

Rooted in social constructivism, the idea that facts, meaning and order are socially constructed is a key philosophical commitment of this research and informs the methodology and analysis. As Finnemore notes, "constructivism makes claims about the nature of social life and change and suggests ways of doing research to uncover links between structural and agentic forces" (Finnemore 1996, 27). In order to understand a phenomenon, therefore, one must not only account for the material conditions of its emergence and evolution but also for how and why social actors intersubjectively create its meaning. Such analysis, I would therefore contend, must

[12] Egyptians often used these terms to describe their feelings and those of the public at large during the author's two research trips in 2006 and 2008. This perspective was also found in the content analysis of the blogs

include consideration of the dominant forms of communication to understand the dynamics of such construction and to link the internal, phenomenological lifeworlds of individuals with societal forces and political hegemonies. Indeed, particular modes of communication favor certain practices, species of thought, organization, authority, and truth over others, but do not determine them. Broader institutional, cultural and social factors exert influence, and ultimately it depends on how people use them (Deibert 1997; Postman 2006).

For example, several scholars have argued that printing ushered in new sociocultural and politico-economic practices, like industrialization, nationalism, and venacularization, and enabled the development of new forms of political organization – the nation-state – and new ways of thinking – like the Enlightenment and nationalism (Anderson 1991; Deibert 1997; Innis 1950; McLuhan 1962). Other have shown the process by which a particular medium, such as TV, becomes a dominant force in a given society, compelling other institutions, such as the press or the political class, to conform to that medium's logic, resulting in new political forms and social practices, such as cable news or electoral campaigns focused on raising money (Altheide and Snow 1979; Bourdieu 1998). Innis, who argued that the medium of writing was essential to the extension of government and military power across vast distances, believed that modes of communication are fundamental to understanding the development of cultural forms and their consequences, whether they be the division of political power, the organization of the economy or the evolution of social practices and groups (1971, xxi). Similarly, I argue, the Internet and social media have ushered in an era in which finding and disseminating information, communicating across vast distances, self-assembling into groups, and engaging in collective action is easier, faster and cheaper than at any point in human history. Groups such as transnational activist networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998), illicit smuggling and terrorist networks

(Naím 2006) and multinational corporations have thrived in this environment even as entirely new types of cultural forms, such as crowdsourcing, citizen journalism, and free many-to-many communication platforms like blogs and social networking, have emerged to take advantage of the "architecture of participation" upon which the internet and the World Wide Web was built (O'Reilly 2004; Lessig 1999). As a result, the democratization of knowledge is occurring alongside the deterioration of traditional, hierarchical authority structures such as professional or anointed expertise, generational deference, and religious tradition. Examining how the ontology and social epistemology that develops through the cultural and political uses of a dominant medium becomes institutionalized and subsequently "reified into a force independent of human action" addresses the concerns about overly deterministic accounts of the impact of technology (Carey 1989, 50).

Constructivism holds that actors and interests are socially constructed variables, rather than a given fact, and treats them as the objects of analysis by emphasizing "the importance of intersubjective understanding in structuring the ways in which actors understand what kinds of actions are valuable, appropriate, and necessary" (Finnemore 1996, 15). I would add to this, which actions are possible and what futures can be imagined. Thus in arguing that networked social media facilitated social contention and that the Egyptian youth movement was created through blogging and social media, this dissertation will explain the process by which "cyberactivists" and "citizen journalists" emerged as categories of actors, the intersubjective understandings that developed, and what this in turn made possible.

Some would argue that there is a difference between reconstructing the phenomenological lifeworlds of a group of activists, and explaining the impact that they and their activities had. But in fact they are intimately related: new media technologies enabled these

activists to express themselves freely and participate in meaningful ways in the public sphere. Although the material world of institutions exists independently in the material world, it is given meaning through the social construction of knowledge about what it means, what one's interests are, and thus the only way we can know world is through practice (Searle 1995). Thus knowledge of how things are derives from certain rational a priori factors that derive from experience but are not reducible to it (Weber 1949). The meaning of things, events and ordering does not exist until people produce, perceive and interpret them (Geertz 2000a, 7). ICTs provided new means by which to produce, disseminate and certify these perceptions and interpretations. Indeed, there was no such thing as *mudawaneen* (bloggers) in the 20th century; the Arabic term for blogger was not created until 2003 and indeed several options were used and debated but *moudawana* (which translates as code in English) eventually became the accepted term. Until 2005 there was no such thing as an Egyptian blogosphere. It was not until people began to name it, to endow the word 'blogosphere' with meaning, that it could become a recognizable, referable place, inhabited by 'bloggers' who created things called 'blogs' and engaged in 'cyberactivism.' Naming is a form of form of certification, and laid the groundwork for the development of social solidarity, or asabiyah, which is a prerequisite for the development of a social movement.

Social constructivism is a way of seeing the impact of cultural and communicative practices, norms of behavior and social practices on political life while recognizing that social structures also have a causal nature (Finnemore 1996, 16). From this perspective, the building blocks of social reality are both material (and thus also technological) and ideational, intersubjective understandings, which express individual and collective intentionality normatively as well as instrumentally (Ruggie 2005, 31). As communication practices

incorporate new technologies, they both affect and are affected by those media. When the Internet first began, people used it to create networks of experts and decentralized communication flows, leading many to conclude that American cultural values like free and equal expression were encoded in the architecture and code of the Internet, as were privatization and consumerism once the Internet developed and grew beyond the initial aims of the government funded-project (Hall 1980; Lessig 1999). But as the Internet and its related media have expanded and societies and states have incorporated new technologies into cultural practices ranging from political contestation to dating to the pervasive creation of networks and surveillance, it is clear that the initial values on which this technology was embedded are not a given but rather must be fought for and invoked.

The use of ICTs to communicate and participate in the public sphere fundamentally reconfigured how these young people perceived of themselves and the potential for change in their societies, turning hopelessness into empowerment. Yet if they had engaged in the same activities, but with no impact on the public sphere or certification by the media agenda, they would not have felt the same sense of empowerment and import. Thus the impact of their activities is fundamentally linked with the development of expectations that enabled them to exercise an agency in their society. But such shifts in the capacity of imagination about a different future are only one dimension of change, and are likely to have limited impact beyond the individual if not translated into material or structural changes. As Barrington Moore observed, "Even fantasies of liberation and revenge can help to preserve domination through dissipating collective energies in relatively armless rhetoric and ritual" (Moore 1978, 495). Constructivism and social movement theory and examine how young cyberactivists were able to activate specific mechanisms that turned potentiality into actuality.

When people, individually and collectively, begin to question this status quo and the rules of the game, they call into question the nature of a given order and the status quo is no longer perceived as inevitable or hegemonic. Throughout the following chapters, I demonstrate how the blogosphere became a public space where Egyptians could raise fundamental questions about what type of political system their country should have, in an unprecedented rethinking of the political status quo that was inspiring and helped create a shift in what people conceived of as possible. "Openly debating who should rule the country and how they obtain this power is now a defining feature of the political landscape," as the anonymous blogger Baheyya put it in a post from Aug. 15, 2009. This dissertation focuses on how this came to be. The insight of the Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun that "human action in the outside world materializes only through thinking about the order of things, since things are based upon each other" was as relevant in 21st century Egypt as in was when he wrote it in the 14th century (Khaldun 1958, 415). However, in the post-millennial era, this thinking through about the order of things took place in public and in a very different information and communication environment.

This dissertation argues that such discourse has normalizing power as young people come to expect more freedom of expression through blogging and to expand their participation into the public sphere. Indeed, as outlined throughout the following chapters, many episodes of contention during the period of study revolved around issues of free expression and represented moments in which activists and supporters transcended political identities and successfully mobilized international support for their cause. Some mobilization campaigns involved primarily one specific group, like the Muslim Brotherhood or women, or particular individuals in episodes of contention with the state. As my interviews and content analysis reveal, such episodes form the common-sense history of the Egyptian blogosphere and show how collective identities and

the identification of collective grievances took place. The need for free expression was largely described by Egyptian youth as being innate, yet it was only when they acted up this need through blogging that it became a powerful engine of change by enabling a politics of small things that turned even minute acts of liking or reposting something into a transgressive act that chipped away at the state's hegemony.

This discourse not only created new norms, but also new potentialities among a populous that was fearful and hopeless about the possibility of change in their country. The very act of routinely expressing oneself and expecting to have the right and ability to do so, had an impact on their mindsets, what they thought was possible. Blogging was empowering, it changed what young bloggers felt and thought was possible, believed were their rights; understanding this required an ethnographic approach in which coming to understand how bloggers themselves felt they had an impact was in fact a development in and of itself, since too often youth felt disenfranchised and unable to affect change as reflected in the fact that (in 2004) more than half had never voted in school elections (Handoussa 2010, 59), only about 20 percent of the population voted in the post-millennial period (with higher participation by illiterate and less educated Egyptians) (Blaydes 2006; Williams 2005), and 76 percent of families did not read newspapers (Abdel Salam 2010). Blogging was a form of participation in the public sphere, but also became an overtly political act, even if a small one, and thus opened up new avenues of participation in political life. These acts of expression also set an example for older Egyptians, who saw these young people taking risks, crossing red lines, getting arrested, and making the excesses and abuses of the Mubarak regime visible. These routine, daily acts of posting blogs, interacting freely with people of various mindsets, and of expressing ones opinions challenged the traditional patterns of deference to authority, whether to the older generation, religious

leaders, males, etc. This occurred within the broader Egyptian youth as well as in the Muslim Brotherhood, and what happened in the later was a microcosm of what was happening on a broader scale nationally.

My approach recognizes that even without revolutionary change occurring, cyberactivism and digital dissent recalibrate the power dynamics between the state and its citizens, and between formal institutions and the public (Lynch 2007a; Norton 1999; Zysman and Newman 2006b). Indeed, the blogosphere and digital media have shifted patterns of political and social life, altered the nature of experience and facilitated new identifications and affiliations as imagined communities of citizens, Arabs and activists (Abu-Lughod 2001; Lynch 2006; Sreberny 2001). They have enabled public opinion formation by providing a space in which citizens can debate received wisdom (like whether the president's son should succeed him or whether a woman must get married), express unpopular positions (such as defending US policy in the Middle East) and attempt to convert others to their views (Mill and Gray 1991). Indeed, I argue that the Egyptian blogosphere emerged as an alternative public sphere.

Public Sphere

Youth were largely excluded from the formal or mass mediated public sphere and the political field in Egypt prior to the advent of blogs and social media. But these new media platforms created new opportunities and mechanisms for participation as they helped reconfigure the boundaries of the public sphere and who got to participate in it while opening up new and alternative public spheres, or what Gitlin terms "sphericules," social fragments without a critical mass (Cunningham 2001, 134; Gitlin 1998). The development of social media facilitated new social configurations, which in turn remapped the boundaries of the political field and constituted a new public sphere. The blogosphere was a mediated public sphere that enabled transmission,

reception and interaction across what Thompson calls different “spacio-temporal reference systems” (Thompson 1995). The notion of a public sphere defines the limits of a community. Its boundaries are political and, in the globalized, technologized Middle East, contested. The blogosphere redrew boundaries between public and private subjects and participation, especially with regards to women’s and Muslim Brotherhood participation in the public sphere.

The term public sphere is most often associated with the Habermasian rational-critical conceptualization in which the ideal of the public sphere is as a realm of democratic decision-making to which all citizens have access (Habermas 1989). In this dissertation, the importance of the blogosphere as a public sphere was about the *networks* not *the proportion* of Egyptian represented in it, nor was it about argument and deliberation as much as it was about free expression and socially contingent identities. It was bounded by the limits of connectivity and technological literacy, excluding many but at the same time enabling young people who were previously excluded from the formal public sphere. Thus not all citizens had guaranteed access, nor was the blogosphere as public sphere a mediator between society and the (liberal) state as much as it was a site of contestation between society and the (authoritarian) state (Habermas 1974, 49, 51). Furthermore, as has been pointed out by critical theorists, feminists and postmodernists, the distinction between private and public life in many such conceptualizations of the public sphere are problematic and contentious, and indeed this was the case in Egypt.

I follow Gambetti in conceptualizing the notion of public spheres as "venues in which otherwise unconnected strangers enter into nonintimate relationships that either make or break sociopolitical hierarchies and norms" and thus opens up venues for collective agency, self-determination and the active shaping of a community through communication (2009, 92-94). This conceptualization emphasizes the performative aspect of the public sphere, emphasizing

practices and the stories people tell. Thus the difference between the passive and active constitution of a community is the pivotal difference that distinguishes a public from a public sphere. Habermas, however, did place the responsibility for the sovereignty of the people "into the flow of communication... in the power of public discourses that uncover topics of relevance to all of society, interpret values, contribute to the resolution of problems, generate good reasons, and debunk bad ones" (1992, 452).

The dominant modes of communication in a society are thus implicated in the formation of particular forms of public spheres. Mass media, for example, enable the formations of publics by portraying the normative and constitutive rules of the collective, whereas the interactive, networked communication of new ICTs facilitate the formation of public spheres in which agents are actively involved in constructing, shaping, and creating the normative rules that emerge through collective self-determination. Such conceptualization is distinct from the Habermasian or Kantian notion of a civic arena of deliberation characterized by the public use of reason, which "glosses over the constitutive role that conflict or political struggle plays in the formation and upholding of public spheres" (Gambetti 2009, 93). The post-millennial era in Egypt, during which blogging and social media use became popular, was a time during which a "public sphere in which the norms and structures of collective life were exposed to critical scrutiny and eventually modified through debate or actual practice" (Gambetti 2009, 99). In such a conceptualization, then, episodes of contention trigger what Gambetti would call "liminal situations," which she defines as instances of crisis where normative structures collapse and new ones are yet inexistent, thus opening up venues for collective agency and self-determination (2009, 94). Such episodes make possible the reconfiguration of norms, hierarchies and communities because they create moments of crisis in which the duality of 'resistance' against

given objective structures is replaced by imaginative and creative liberation from such reference points. The organization and mobilization aspect was important because it decreased information barriers and facilitated collective action, but these were in fact secondary to the primary role that social media use played in creating new roles for youth in the public sphere, in the media system and in politics.

The blogosphere became one of the most important public spheres in Egypt in the post-millennial decade. It was a new space for public participation and in this space youth occupied positions of power, whereas many actors who occupied positions of power in other fields were largely absent or less powerful; this sphere was strongly influenced by the journalistic field. It was constituted through blogging and the practices of cyberactivism and citizen journalism, emerging through contestation over norms, values and "rules" of participation in this public sphere. The blogosphere became the location where young Egyptians converged during such liminal situations and performed acts of rebellion against the system. These social spaces can become fields of practice that become visible through socially contingent identities, values of expression and production, and modes of speech. "How such a space defines and defends its membership, and ways that it invites and curtails speech and from whom, can facilitate and trouble how power circulates among participants, and can further distress constructions like 'democracy' and 'subalternaity'" (Estep 2008, 10). When new social spaces are produced and imagined they delegate status differently than in previously existing spaces or fields. They give rise to new power dynamics and subject positions, yet many conceptualizations of the public sphere fail to account for how these configurations impact the role and power of various actors in the public sphere. Field theory can fill this gap and make visible the ways in which particular configurations and constitutive rules in the blogosphere, for example, favored and empowered

some actors and practices over others. In the next section I explain how blogging, the performative practice that constituted the blogosphere as a public sphere, gave rise to the youth movement.

My decision to focus on a particular subset of activist youth as opposed to the broad masses, laborers, illiterate farmers, or other groups does not diminish the importance of those other Egyptians, it is simply not my particular focus as they were not implicated in the public sphere constituted in the blogosphere and through blogging. Indeed, most conceptions of the public sphere have been criticized for excluding categories of people, from women to non-bourgeoisie to the illiterate, and thus it is often preferable to speak about public spheres. Critics have attempted to disenfranchise and undermine voices in the blogosphere by dismissing them as elite, non-representative, and a minority. But the fact is that youth in general were excluded from the formal public sphere.

Field Theory

I found that Bourdieu's field theory was a useful framework for analyzing the logic of various fields of power, such as politics, journalism or cyberactivism, and why certain repertoires of contention worked (or did not) and helped explain power dynamics in the public sphere. Indeed, the journalistic field plays a central role in constructing and maintaining the mediated, formal public sphere, and thus I would argue that shifts in the field impact the dynamics of the public sphere. I follow Bourdieu in conceptualizing the field as a relatively autonomous social space, in which individuals are situated, that is structured by the power relations of social positions competing for resources and given meaning through sets of practices and norms specific that that field (Bourdieu 1989; 1991, 28; 2005). Field theory as a framework for analysis incorporates both the structural and representational, enabling one to analyze "the agents'

engagement with the objective structures of the modern world, crystallized in those patterns of relations" called fields, as well as the "force of representations – classifications, signifiers … - in constructing agents' principles of vision and division" (Fowler 2000, 1-2). In other words, the analysis of the field accounts for both the objective/reified social reality and how agents engage with those structures through specific practices that crystallize into patterns and activate particular mechanisms or sequences of mechanisms that can enable the accumulation of various forms of capital, and thus power. Such analysis can therefore make visible the subject positions and power resources available in a given public sphere, such as the blogosphere or the mediatized public sphere, enabling a more nuanced understanding of who has the power to activate particular mechanisms and sequences of mechanisms and why. It can also contribute to a more robust explanation of why certain repertoires or contention develop and the iterative impact of time and institutionalization.

The concept of a field links structure and agency, enabling analysis of the interplay and dialectic of structural and environmental factors at the individual and societal level. Fields comprise sets of power relations, identities and subject positions, and forms of capital that are valued according to the logic of that field. Thus the journalistic field considers both the agency of individual journalists as well as the structures conditioning the performance of that agency, such as professional norms, economic conditions and institutional configurations (Benson and Neveu 2005b; Bourdieu 1989; Bourdieu 1998). Positions within a field and between fields can explain why particular mechanisms or repertoires of contention were or were not available or successful.

Network Theory and Logic

The technologies and ICT platforms that enable cyberactivism operate according to a networking logic, drawing their power and potentiality from connective informational logic, and thus favored the development of networks as the dominant social form that emerged from their use. Although I do not argue that the properties of these new ICTs were either innately liberating or inherently repressive, I do maintain that they are networked, global and participatory and that those agents who leverage their potentiality can benefit from their inherent properties. Whereas broadcast media were historically linked with nation-building in Egypt and the broader Middle East, because of the capital-intensive infrastructure that could be controlled and tied to state interests relatively easily, this was not so with the Internet and blogosphere in Egypt (Abu-Lughod 2002, 2005). And indeed this research explains how Egyptian bloggers pioneered many of the tools of the cyberactivist's tactical repertoire, leveraging the unique characteristics of new, networked social media platforms and the creativity of a generation of youth with few other outlets for expression or participation.

Scale-free networks like the Internet have specific properties that characterize how they grow and expand, and thus that limit or enhance what can be done with them (Barabási 2003, 12). Like most large networks, the Internet is characterized by a hub-dominated architecture and functions according to power laws, rather than for example random distribution, meaning that a few sites get most of the traffic with the vast majority getting few to no hits, or visits, per day (Karpf 2008). As Barabási, explains, "new nodes prefer to attach to the more connected nodes, a process known as preferential attachment" and as a result "a rich-gets-richer process is observed, which means that the highly connected nodes acquire more links than those that are less connected, leading to the natural emergence of a few highly connected hubs" (2009, 412). Thus

early adopters who remained active in the network had a higher likelihood of remaining key nodes in the network even as it grew and became more complex. Thus there are a few highly popular blogs and many more far less popular ones, and these hubs thus help coordinate and aid navigation of the network. These characteristics of the network thus suggest must understand not only the typology of the network but also at the processes of "actual dynamical interactions between people" (Barabási 2003), which is the project of the next several chapters. Because of this architecture, information that flows through social networks online can reach exponentially more people than in previous times. Hence dynamics such as information cascades and the thresholds for participating in collective action are inherently influenced by the technological properties of digital and social networks (Lohmann 1994, Siegal 2005, 343, Faris 2010).

Technological changes have chipped away at the armor of state control over national media systems, opening them to greater competition and public participation (Radsch 2007b). States are not only losing control over the national media system, but they exert minimal control over cyberspace and would need to exert significant resources to influence the power law dynamics of growth and popularity in the blogosphere. Some, such as Iran and China, have indeed hired legions of bloggers to attempt to manipulate online content and create sympathetic nodes, but this was not the case in Egypt (Kelly and Cook 2011; Kalathil and Boas 2003). Globalization, pressures for liberalization and deregulation, demands for political and social changes stemming from increased public participation in the public sphere through the Internet and interactive satellite news programming, have converged on the region and changed the contours of the public sphere and the nature of participation in it. Pan-Arab satellite stations, for example, spurred changes in the Arabic media system that compelled the domestic media system in Egypt to adapt to a new logic of competition and representation and created new opportunity

structures for young cyberactivists (Pintak 2008; Radsch 2007b). Networked social media similarly shifted the logic of the journalistic field and, in doing so, challenged the state's predominance in this key field of symbolic production and hegemonic control.

Furthermore, online media is not only networked, it is digital. Digitalization has enabled the convergence of images, sound, and print technologies into a single medium qualitatively different from its antecedents in terms of interactivity, instantaneity and the dissolution of the boundary between mass communication and personalization. The Internet is thus both a mass medium, stretching beyond national borders and across cultural groups, and an infinitesimally personalized medium, enabling targeted, segmented and individualized content production and reception. This was a new form of communication during the period of study, and those who took advantage of it could position themselves more favorably in particular fields of power in which communications are central, such as journalism and politics.

These new, innovative platforms were important because although these platforms enabled decentralized, interconnected, instantaneous communication and organization across vast distances of time, space and social groups, they also permitted new modes and depths of surveillance (Reporters Sans Frontières 2009; MacKinnon 2012; Zarwan 2005; Zittrain 2008). This tension plays out throughout the episodes of contention I analyze in the following chapters, but it was often the adeptness of young activists at staying ahead of the Mubarak regime, which was largely absent from the public sphere created by the blogosphere. I return to this point in Chapter Five.

As mentioned, a central contention of my research is that technological changes are not causes of political change in and of themselves, rather they facilitate or make more difficult particular modes of communication, which in turn have significant implications for the evolution

and character of society, politics and belief systems (Deibert 1997; Shirky 2008). As one leading blogger wrote on the front page of his blog: "In a dictatorship, independent journalism by default becomes a form of activism, and the spread of information is essentially an act of agitation."[13] And indeed the proliferation of information and communication in closed political systems is agitating and challenging to political power holders, whether they reside in the formal political system or in the media system, i.e. the Fourth Estate, and thus I argue that they must adapt to or co-opt ICTs to remain hegemonic. Specifically I show in the following chapters how blogging became both an outlet for political activism as well as a practice that often led to political awakening and awareness as apolitical youth became politically active by and through blogging. Even the small act of writing a post, a tweet or linking to a video could become a political act that enabled young Egyptians to participate in the public sphere as never before and generate autonomous, sovereign alternatives to the hegemonic narratives of the state or its institutions. This participation, as noted above, often took the form of cyberactivism or citizen journalism.

The literature on regime stability and Internet censorship, furthermore, underscores the significant challenges posed by entrenched authoritarian systems, as in Egypt, while arguing that surveillance, blocking and heavy-handed tactics gave repressive governments the upper hand (Boas 2006; Kalathil and Boas 2003; Morozov 2011). The contention of this literature is that despite the advantages of reduced organizational and communication costs, the Internet and other digital technologies have minimal effects on authoritarian regimes and states have largely succeeded in restricting online dissent (Boas 2006; Faris and Etling 2008; Kalathil and Boas 2003; Zittrain 2008). The literature on the durability of authoritarianism more broadly and particularly in the Middle East, also posits that robust coercive apparatuses, found in the

[13] http://www.arabawy.com

predominance of patrimonialism, rentierism, and international support, limits popular mobilization for reform and that the characteristics of the state prevented transitions to democracy (Owen 1992; Posusney and Angrist 2005). Many of these conclusions, however, rest on the assumption that political impact was equivalent with institutional or regime change, policy reforms, or other high-level, institutional processes without considering the broader epistemological and cognitive changes taking place among the public, in the conceptualization of the public sphere and participation, and in the construction of citizenship. By focusing on the politics of small things we can see how social media empowered individuals and subaltern groups, challenging the hegemony of the state, reconfiguring the public sphere, and reinterpreting what was once taken for granted. Indeed this dissertation responds to the plea to focus on mid-level processes that connect micro and macro level processes and dynamics and explains how they affect each other through meso-level structures (Staggenborg 2002).

This does not mean that we leave the state to the side, since state funding, infrastructure and architectural choices about how to design the digital networks and access are part of the story because they create opportunity structures and path dependency (Zysman and Newman 2006a). Indeed, constructing a robust explanation for why some technologically-inflected social movements thrive and others do not requires consideration of the structural conditions and opportunity structures created by the state. As Beth Simone Noveck noted, "design matters; value choices translate into design choices" and software and hardware choices can "impose the structures that transforms communication into deliberation" (2004, 21-22).

Conclusion and Chapter Summary

Information communication technologies, and blogs and social media in particular, were relatively new when I began my research, and indeed some of them emerged during the period of study. Temporal dynamics are discussed at several points during the ensuing analysis, which is structured thematically rather than chronologically, as the development of technological capabilities (such as Arabized platforms) and expansion of access and participation in these social media were important to explaining the development of the movement. Similarly the dimension of newness remerges at several points, not only as a key variable but also in my research design and methodological approach. Thus in Chapter Two, I explain in detail the methodology I used because I had to draw on new ways of conceptualizing how to do ethnographic research and participant observation online and how to link it with the more standard approaches to doing so offline in the embodied world. This chapter puts the research into context by addressing how the environment and my approach influenced how I gathered data and conducted participant observation, and proposes pursuing embodied and virtual ethnography as a more robust approach to studying the uses and impact of new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Because broader institutional, cultural and social factors exert influence over how particular modes of communication are used, and the types of public spheres and participatory practices they give rise to, Chapter Three examines the technoinstitutional dynamics of the Egypt case in the post-milennial period. This chapter also explains why Mubarak did not just block Internet access, shut down blogs and social media, or put all the bloggers in jail. Indeed one might think that if authoritarian states could seemingly just stop people from using empowering

small media, they would be able to prevent new social movements from forming. But it is not so easy, since there are competing economic and ideational interests and constitutive choices that make some approaches more palatable than others. This chapter argues that constitutive choices about ICT development created a level of path dependency that constrained and enabled some approaches over others. It argues that although Mubarak attempted to use the law when possible to restrict free expression, there were prevailing interests, including significant economic interests and concern over his image internationally, that constrained his choices and help explain why the blogosphere was able to become a realm of contention.

I turn in Chapter Four I turn to the empirical analysis of citizen journalism as a form of cyberactivism. If, as Gramsci argued, the press are the most dynamic part of ideological structure of ruling class, along with anything else that (in)directly influences public opinion, then understanding how social media enabled changes in the power of the press and undermined the hegemony of the status quo is important (1992b, 52-53). If the press (as in media institutions writ large not just the printed press) are largely state-owned and/or government-controlled then they can be envisaged as extensions of the state, and if changing the balance of power between the state and the public is part of the goal of any social movement, then examining framing contests and symbolic struggles in the media can provide specific examples of when and how this did or did not occur. In that chapter I present a definition of citizen journalism and conceptualization of how and why citizen journalism develops as a form of activism in repressive societies. It argues that citizen journalism as a form of activism is most powerful, or successful, when it influences the mainstream media, public policy and public perception, and that there are specific mechanisms present when this occurs. Contrary to what information optimists assert about the central role that increased information flows play in political learning and activism, in fact this

research supports other studies that show that motivation is just as important to political learning, and thus examining areas of alienation and interest formation is highly significant (Maghami 1974, 340). The combination of information flows and motivational opportunities therefore provide greater likelihood that political learning and participation will take place.

In Chapter Five I turn to an analysis of the development of the new youth movement and the specific ways in which blogs and social media networks were implicated in that process. It also analyses the opportunity structures that enabled this and the responses by the regime, as well as the dynamics of diffusion of blogging among youth in Egypt. In order to explain a system's topology, whether a network, a media system or a public sphere, "we first need to describe how it came into being" (Barabási) It explores how strategies of resistance and power were incorporated in choices about identity, anonymity and participation in the virtual public sphere, and how regime responses informed these strategies and gave rise to asabiyah and the potential for collective action. I examine key moments of contention that helped shape and define the blogosphere as the locus where the youth-led social movement emerged, and the development of the collective action frames that connected them. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood were among these bloggers, and given the organization's role in Egyptian politics, and the importance of cross-ideational solidarity and consensus-building in the youth movement, I turn in Chapter Six to a specific analysis of the dynamics of how youth in the Brotherhood used these new ICTs to bring about political shifts within the organization and participate in the broader youth movement that was being created in the blogosphere. It explores how the emergence of rank-and-file Muslim Brotherhood members in cyberspace followed the same patterns and was due to the same sequence of mechanisms as the broader Egyptian blogosphere, and thus suggests that these dynamics could be found in other cases as well. Bloggers challenged not only the authority

of the state but also of the Brotherhood leadership and Islamic spiritual guides by invoking their right to interpret Islam, translate Islamic tenets into the vernacular and speak as a Muslim.

Finally, in Chapter Seven I conclude with some final observations about how the Egyptian youth movements, led by cyberactivists and citizen journalists, mobilized massive demonstrations that attracted wide swaths of the public to the streets in unprecedented numbers and prompted the government to shut down the Internet and mobile phone networks and kept the stock market offline for more than a month. Less than a decade after the information revolution came to Egypt the country's youth successfully mobilized the overthrow of the state and its president. This concluding chapter examines how the groundwork laid by cyberactivists over the previous years came to fruition, drawing together the threads of the previous chapters and suggesting how the analytical framework and new repertoires of contention apply beyond this specific case.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY: THE EMBODIMENT OF VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

"What happens in the streets happens in the blogs – you spit in the street you spit on the blog – what's different is the exchange of ideas" – Sherif Ahmed

This chapter discusses the methodology and procedures I used to design, develop, and interpret my research. One of the contributions of this research is the development of an approach to studying the impact of new media technologies and specifically social media, which I contend must account for the mutual constitution and reconstitution of the embodied and virtual. The dimension of newness is central not only in the analysis but also in the research design and approach. I had to draw on new ways of conceptualizing how to do ethnographic research and participant observation online and how to link it with the more standard approaches to doing so offline in the embodied world; new ways of gathering data in the blogosphere and on social media networks given the newness of the subject matter and the platforms themselves; and how to negotiate the complex, technologically-inflected and/or embodied relationships with informants in different spheres. It suggests how to study technologically-inflected groups and movements, and the contributions that an ethnographic approach can make to understanding the complex process of identity construction, movement formation, and the development of contentious repertoires. Indeed it makes the case that particular dynamics of cyberactivism can only be seen in real-time, and thus call for "virtual ethnography" and participant observation, or what Mankekar terms "conjunctural ethnography" (Hine 2000; Mankekar 1999).

This chapter therefore begins with a discussion of my methodological approach, namely textual analysis and ethnographic methods of data collection on- and offline, informed by a

grounded theory approach for data collection and interpretation. It discusses the reason for using this methodology to collect data as well as how this works in cyberspace. The next section, data collection, discusses the procedures I employed as well as how I gained access to participants in the physical field (Egypt) and in cyberspace. I discuss the data analysis and the methods I used to make sense of the data I had collected. In the final section I address particular issues in the application of that method, including the role my identity played in gaining access and how it influenced my ability to conduct this research. This section puts the research into context by addressing how the environment in which I conducted the research influenced how I gathered data and conducted participant observation, and proposes pursuing embodied and virtual ethnography as a more robust approach to studying the uses and impact of new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Although Egypt was a police state under emergency law since 1981, it was ruled by the same president for more than two decades and was thus relatively stable. Conducting research in such a political environment poses a challenge to the social scientist and requires negotiating volatile and at times dangerous situations. Trust, access, and confidentiality come into focus in different ways than they might in less difficult situations. The challenges of conducting social investigation in environments where risk accrues to research subjects *and* investigator, as well as some of the cultural and political issues surrounding the feasibility and practicality of doing research in Egypt are discussed in this chapter. In my research on new media and political activism I primarily focused on vulnerable populations – bloggers, activists, journalists – that were the targets of state violence, harassment and intimidation. This figures into issues of feasibility and practicality for the social scientist, from the need for personal introductions to subjects' willingness to talk openly and "on-the-record." In both cases, however, *wasta*, loosely

translated as connections, and *isnad* were especially important for making initial contact and to build the trust and credibility required to pursue an interview or participant observation. Since this research took place over several years and in multiple places, space and time were also relevant factors to the nature of inquiry, and figured in the design and conduct of the research.

Part I: Methodology

This dissertation follows other scholars who have employed ethnographic approaches to study politics. My methodological commitment, as mentioned in Chapter One, is to a constructivist philosophy, imputing agency into socio-structural accounts by emphasizing how people construct social structures that influence and reconstruct them (Finnemore 1996, 24). These accounts, however, are conditioned by the historical context in which they are produced. The means of distribution and institutional arrangements in a particular society provide different opportunity structures to different actors, and are perpetuated through discourse and practices that empower certain groups over others. The political, economic, security and geopolitical structures and ideologies of a given era similarly create limitations and opportunities, often exerting a dominating and even subsuming influence over the public sphere. Egypt's security apparatus and byzantine bureaucracy, for example, were social structures with profound influence on daily life and social imagination. Public discourse helps constitute societal configurations even as it is conditioned by them, and reveals the rules and norms of that society. And public discourse is inextricably intertwined with the dominant modes of communication in a given society, and thus with information communication technology (ICT). It also produces certain types of subjects and authority roles, which in turn have access to particular resources. So

examining how particular discourse configurations get used and deployed can reveal how agents and categories of agents, like bloggers or activists, emerge and help explain how and in what ways they can create a movement and have a political impact. It also explains how societal and authority configurations come about and how they get used as well as where contestation over these arrangements emerges.

The ethnographic approach I used seeks to tell a story about a process, in this case how particular mechanisms concatenate to produce particular outcomes (Burawoy 2000). As Wolcott notes, ethnography can describe process or outcome in order to produce an analytic narrative that is "a kind of account of human social activity out of which cultural patterning can be discerned" (Wolcott 1999, 41, 68). This research adopts what he terms "ethnographic techniques" to describe how patterns of mechanisms produced specific results, but does not aim to produce an ethnography. I also analyze the shifting institutional context in which these processes and activities took place and how these enabled particular developments or made others less likely, since all stories are embedded in a particular context. Chief among these were the information and communication technologies that were available during the period under study and how informants used and adapted them. As new ICTs emerged and some platforms grew in popularity over others, new or different opportunity structures were available or created. Following the path of Weber and Durkheim, the goal of this research is to create clear concepts and identify social facts (Laitin 1995) that emerge from an analytical narrative tracing the process of cyberactivism and the development of repertoires of contentious politics while contextualizing these within institutional and technological contexts (Tarrow 1995). Indeed, the technological context was particularly fluid and dynamic because of the speed and scale of technology development and adoption. Translocal "contexts of power" such as state power, the post-September 11, 2001 "War

on Terror," and transnational activist networks were also important to the local context of the Egyptian blogosphere and thus inform the story this dissertation tells (Mankekar 1999).

The object of ethnography is to sort out the "structures of signification" and what they mean and why they matter. One way such Geertzian webs of meaning can be seen is in discourse; another is in practices. Discourse, composed of speech acts, constructs the world by creating rules, institutions and structures that provide the context, hierarchies and order in which agents act (Onuf 1998). Practices embody the daily acts that constitute and reinforce or seek to undermine institutional and structural forces. These daily acts of being are often only visible to the research that is present in their practice, via participant observation, for even an account recounted later is subject to the reflection and interpretation of that person. Participant observation is the most scientific of methods, according to Gans, because by allowing people to get close to those being it observed "it allows researchers to observe what people do, while all the other empirical methods are limited to reporting what people say about what they do" (1999, 540). In contrast, media content can be studied via content analysis, statistical analysis, or other nomothetic quantitative approaches, but the practices and processes that result in the final product are hidden and thus require an ethnographic framework both to collect data and to conduct analysis (Evans 2004). For example, watching how a hashtag spreads and becomes trending or fails to gain traction, or how individuals change their Facebook profile picture to that of an imprisoned blogger or post a banner on their blogs calling for the release of someone, can only happen in real time through participation in the social networks of the blogosphere. These practices can typically only be observed in real time, as they are not archived or documented for observation after the fact. Therefore, the continuity of maintaining contact between and around visits with certain bloggers as well as maintaining my presence in the Egyptian blogosphere

enabled me to gain and maintain access and make observations across space and time about practices in the blogosphere and the dynamic process that created a social movement.

Published works solidify these practices or speech acts, setting them into a textual form that can be analyzed and referred to and interpreted. By tracing someone's writing or video posts and how they relate to others, such as through their blogrolls and "friends" list, I could see the dynamics and characteristics of this social network and the contours of the movement (Gramsci 1992, 137-139). Some speech acts can be found documented in writing – such as on blogs and Facebook or in editorials and speeches. But other speech acts that construct common sense knowledge of the world are created and conveyed in conversation, daily routines, practices and living. Thus to get a comprehensive, multifaceted narrative one must examine both the documented and the lived, the latter of which can be observed by going into the field.

Going into the field takes on new meaning in a study of a location that exists only online, like the blogosphere. As Glaser and Strauss note about field studies, "theoretical sampling usually requires reading documents, interviewing, and observing at the same time, since all slices of data are relevant" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 75). In my case it also involved going online to examine the textual representations of selves on blogs, the way networks were constructed in these virtual spaces that gave rise to a social movement, and the sequencing of mechanisms during episodes of contention. Going online and offline is a form of triangulation that serves to increase validity of interpretation and creates a dialectic that reduces the dualism of how on- and offline identities, practices, and communities configure each other (Orgad 2005, 62-63). As Orgad notes, online one knows informants textually whereas offline one must rely on visual and embodied knowledge and cues.

I employed the contrapuntal approach of Edward Said by focusing on the texture of links between texts, experiences, and institutions, stressing the formative role of exchanges and thus contributing to a better understanding about the relational aspects of identity and the construction of collective grievances and activist networks (Kraidy, 2005). It couples this with a configurational analysis of social action and technological change in order to construct an analytic narrative about the development of the youth movement and its impact in Egypt. As Jackson explains, configurational analysis involves empirically "delineating the resources available and tracing the ways that they are deployed in practice, while sticking close enough to the data that statements about available resources have more of an empirical than a conceptual character" (Jackson 2006, 266). I therefore embraced multiple techniques to collect convergent data, including experiencing, enquiring and examining in addition to discourse analysis of blog postings to produce analytic narratives of key episodes of contention (Wolcott 1999, 44-46) (Geertz 2000a). Geertz uses the term convergent data to refer to the:

> Descriptions, measures, observations, what you will, which are at once diverse, even rather miscellaneous, both as to type and degree of precision and generality, unstandardized facts, opportunistically collected and variously portrayed, which yet turn out to shed light on one another for the simple reason that the individuals they are descriptions, measures, or observations of are directly involved in one another's lives. (Geertz 2000b)

An analytic narrative explains complex outcomes, such as a social movement or political change, by focusing on temporal processes, explaining how a thing came to be through a sequence of steps that resulted from a particular configuration of "common and interdependent activities" (Becker 1992, 208-9). Stories focus on processes, which can be constitutive of results, and explain why it is inevitable that *this* process led to *this* result (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 212). The analysis, therefore is an operation whose major object is to discover "what exactly the end

result is" (Becker 1992, 210). Thus instead of seeking to establish the association between independent and dependent variable, the research becomes the story of how something got to be the way it is, a story of complex technological, institutional, and political configurations that can only be discovered by participating in the lives of the participants over a period of time (Becker 1992, 210, 215). And indeed time was an important element of study, since social movements do not arise instantaneously and political change takes time. Ethnographic and anthropological methods, which by their nature must take place over a lengthy period of time, are therefore particularly suited to explaining the rise and dynamics of the Egyptian youth movement, while grounded theory lets the story of how it became linked with a created through blogging and social media emerge from the data rather than be imposed on it.

Grounded theory is particularly fitted to constructing an analytic narrative of a new phenomenon like cyberactivism and citizen journalism because it aims at building rather than testing theory. I discuss this approach further in the section on data analysis. Grounded theory is an inductive logic for analyzing data that begins with individual cases and seeks to explain and develop patterns and relationships within it (Charmaz 2001). Thus the researcher begins with an area of interest and asks "What is happening here?" rather than pre-assigning categories and definitions as in other approaches to data collection and analysis. Hence the evolution of my research question during my trips to the field, as explained in the Introduction.

Based on the preliminary fieldwork I conducted in 2006 in Egypt, I developed a set of themes, topics and questions that I thought it would be important to cover to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research objectives, but allowed for others to develop over the course of research. These also emerged by "gleaning information from the works of others" (Evans 2004, 205; Wolcott 1999), specifically by reading and watching Arabic news, reading

blogs and following Twitter and Facebook accounts, watching YouTube videos posted by Egyptian bloggers on Facebook, reading articles and reports by journalists and bloggers, and examining the texts of laws and statutes that shaped their expressive rights and punishments.

My research took place in both a physical space defined by geographic and political borders as well as in the deterritorialized space of the Egyptian blogosphere. Yet both physical (or embodied) and non-physical sites are 'places' in the sense that they are "a condition for the kinds of performances that can be attained" (Cicognana 2003, 83-4). While studying the social worlds and identities built by people online "challenges the classical dimensions of sociological research" (Paccagnella 1997) it is crucial for social scientists to acknowledge that although 'virtual' in the sense that it lacks physical embodiment the social world created there extends into and through 'real life' and like other social relations these online relations spill into other domains of interaction. I therefore largely avoid the term virtual in favor of the prefix cyber to refer to space and activism. I do reserve the term virtual to distinguish from the embodied, physical field in which I conducted research.

Part II: Methods

Bounding the Egyptian blogosphere

The contours of a specifically Egyptian blogosphere emerged as I began observing and interacting with bloggers and reading their blogs, which were in English and Arabic. Once in the field I discovered that my question about how the Egyptian blogosphere emerged reflected its distinctiveness from "the blogosphere" more generally. For although there are certainly links among bloggers and its boundaries are not perfectly defined, there is nonetheless a distinctive place in cyberspace that has been socially constructed as "Egyptian" since the outset of blogging

in the Arab world. Bloggers, journalists, politicians and others refer to it, interact with and at times punish its members. This observation was reinforced by a study by Harvard's Berkman Center that found the Arabic blogosphere in 2009 was primarily organized around countries (Etling et al. 2009, 3). "In the Arabic blogosphere the primary centers of gravity are national" according to its network analysis of 35,000 active blogs, with Egyptian bloggers comprising nearly one-third of them and thus forming the largest structural cluster in the Arabic blogosphere (Etling et al. 2009, 15).

As mentioned in the introduction, I initially defined the Egyptian blogosphere as the Internet community of blogs that discussed, analyzed and opine about the physical entity of Egypt and/or the author's identity as an Egyptian, were identified as part of the Egyptian blogosphere by its members, and were maintained by bloggers who were physically located in Egypt at some point while blogging. These three criteria – Egyptianness, verification and physical presence – emerged from textual analysis and ethnographic inquiry as important contours differentiating this realm of cyberspace from other realms. Many blogs included "blogrolls" that linked to other blogs under headings like "Egyptian Blogs" or similar titles. Physical presence also emerged as an important definer of "Egyptian blogger."[14] I adapted the definition of blogosphere to include the microblog Twitter and the social networking site Facebook because they emerged as extensions of the blogosphere and platforms of cyberactivist engagement. Most Core bloggers and cyberactivists were among the early adopters of Twitter and Facebook, and thus these platforms and others like YouTube and Flikr appeared to me to be extensions of the blogosphere, which I do not conceptualize as platform specific. The same criteria applied to these venues, although as bloggers grew older and got married or sought

[14] Blogrolls are the hyperlinked lists in the margins of other blogs the blog in questions links to. These can be categorized or uncategorized. Often bloggers use categories such as "Egyptian bloggers/blogs" or "Arab blogs."

advanced degrees, some of them moved abroad, but continued to identify and blog/tweet/Facebook about Egypt.

I did not include Americans (such as Marc Lynch's Abu Aardvark or Juan Cole's Informed Comment) who write about Egyptian blogs and politics nor expatriate Egyptians because they were not considered a part of the community of bloggers, their blogs did not regularly show up as Egyptian on blogrolls, and they did not physically reside in Egypt. Given the exponential growth of the Internet and number of blogs it was essential to delimit the field of inquiry according to the three criteria above.[15]

Bounding the Egyptian blogosphere was an iterative process that required textual analysis of blogs and input from the community itself. Hamalawy turned out to be one of the first bloggers in Egypt and the subject of articles many article about his activism and blogging. He blogged at Arabist.com, along with a couple other English-language bloggers, which was my launching pad into the Egyptian blogosphere.

Data Collection: Reality and Virtuality: Ethnographic Access and Participant Observation

I began with a core group of about five bloggers who I met or learned of through existing contacts, human rights reports, and newspaper reports about the so-called Egyptian blogosphere in 2006. Some of them were interested in my research and offered to introduce me to fellow bloggers or suggest which blogs to review. I also used the blogrolls to find the most commonly linked blogs, that is, which blogs appeared most frequently, in different categories such as women, Ikhwan, activists, and such, and sought out those bloggers. I collected profile data from the blogger profile pages and within blog posts, and determined if they were Egyptian and based

[15] For discussions on defining the field of inquiry and community of study in cyberspace see (Hine 2000; Smith and Kollock1999).

in Egypt. Online profiles, for example, often include descriptors such as gender, age, education or even photos, which may or may not faithfully represent the reality of someone's identity. If there was no profile I read the posts to ascertain whether they were located in Egypt. In general these data can only be verified through in-person interviews, a verification valuable not for its generic truthfulness but rather for what it reveals about the person's identity and representational choices online.

Since there is no way to ascertain the veracity of such online profiles without meeting face-to-face, I also conducted semi- or unstructured, in-person interviews. I collected data about the level of education, where the blogger grew up and went to high school, whether s/he owned their own computer and how they accessed the Internet, and how much they spend per month on Internet access as well as how they characterize this cost (for example, inexpensive, expensive). Since I met many of the bloggers face-to-face I was able to conclude that most bloggers fill out the profile truthfully, and they nearly all truthfully accounted for at least the country they lived in, increasing my confidence in including bloggers even when I could not meet the blogger personally. I interviewed them about why they started blogging and why they continued, their online habits and their perception of asabiyah within the blogosphere. I asked questions on particular topics at the end of the interview if respondents had not addressed them already.

I "friended" many Egyptian cyberactivists and youth on Facebook, followed them on Twitter, and subscribed to their blogs via RSS feeds or Google Reader. I also conducted informal conversations, chats and Facebook/Twitter exchanges with subjects as I sought to participate in their social worlds (Burawoy 2000; Geertz 2000a). I observed who was in their social network, and often used these linkages to reach out to new informants. In the both the embodied and the virtual field I was personally introduced to many other bloggers, and through my participation

and observation in the blogosphere I met many others online. On my second fieldwork visit to Egypt my blog became even more important since clearly having a blog is an essential component of being a blogger and thus enabled me to gain access to the community I was studying as a participant observer. I also saw blogging as a way to make my identity and project more transparent to potential informants and provide a way of giving back to the community I was studying. By spending time with one of the well-known Muslim Brotherhood bloggers at her home in Sharqiya and at her university, I was able to gain access to many other members of that particular community. By attending workshops and conferences on blogging I met many of the activist bloggers who in turn introduced me or referred me to other bloggers.

As Table 1 shows, I conducted a total of 163 formal interviews between May 2006 and May 2008, with 93 interviews conducted during the main physical fieldwork period of January through May 2008, 38 between May and August 2006, and the rest conducted in Dubai, Washington D.C. or elsewhere outside of Egypt.[16] I also participated in countless informal discussions and chats with bloggers, journalists, students, taxi drivers and others about blogging and activism in Egypt. In addition, I conducted eight focus groups and attended three conferences for Egyptian bloggers in 2008. The vast majority of the more formal research discussions were conducted at least partially if not entirely in Arabic, though many informants used a combination of the two languages since many technological terms originated in English or they were more comfortable speaking about certain topics in one language or the other. In the years following my physical research in the field I had many conversations and interviews with

[16] These numbers do not include the countless informal conversations I had with individuals in Egypt and online, including in at conferences, protests, and in classes, taxis, cafes, restaurants, etc., which informed my overall research experience, interpretation and analysis. I incorporated many of these informal conversations into my fieldnotes. In many cases I interviewed or at least talked with participants more than once, but here I have only counted the formal interviews and only counted each interviewee once, with the exception of a couple whom I interviewed in 2006 then again in 2008. Informants are identified according to their requested level of anonymity.

bloggers, journalists, and activists for my work as a journalist for Al Arabiya, with a human rights organization, and for independent research projects on related topics. These are not counted among the formal interviews, but nonetheless helped form my understanding of the phenomenon of cyberactivism and blogging.

Table 1 Formal interviews conducted

Time Period	Blogger	Journalist/Media Professional	Other (academic, government, student)	Total
Summer 2006	4	22	14	40
Winter/Spring 2008	70	16	7	93
Other	15	9	6	30
Total	**87**	**47**	**27**	**163**

I sought access to populations and spaces both real and virtual, on- and off-line and there was some significant overlap; but there were also informants who were only accessible in one or the other. Participant observation online allows on to know informants textually whereas physical observation is more complex and rich, comprising visual and aural cues and embodied practices (Orgad 2005, 62). Going back and forth from the real to the virtual and back reduces dualism of how on and offline configure each other (Slater 2002). I also hoped that such multi-sited ethnography would allow me to discover and understand connections between macro-level forces like globalization, privatization, transnational activism, and American foreign policy and micro-level identities, practices and networks (Duneier 2001, 177). Understanding these connections were critical to understanding the dynamics of the blogosphere and why it developed along a particular trajectory. By de-reifying the Egyptian blogosphere it was possible to find it in Cairo, in Sharqiya, in the Egyptian mainstream media, and in cyberspace.

My fieldwork involved multi-sited ethnographic methodology – interviewing, observation, participant observation, focus groups – and content analysis of texts (including profiles produced online) to create the thick description necessary to identify and interpret the meaningful structures and discourses that construct the Egyptian blogosphere (Geertz 2000a; Hine 2000). I conceptualized the Internet as both a space and practice that embodies and transmits political culture as well as a cultural and political artifact (Hine 2000). The logic of triangulating data gathering techniques in multiple sites is that triangulation increases the validity of the interpretation, and thus I also analyzed texts and the digital detritus of blogging and social media activity.

Blog postings, news articles and social media posts illustrated the ways in which collective identities were narrated, frames constructed and resources deployed. Critical discourse analysis of these discursive texts can reveal tropes, deployments of narratives and commonplaces or themes structures and strategies of communication that reproduce the system or indicate critical junctures of change (Van Dijk 1993). I applied critical discourse analysis to legal texts along with media coverage, blog posts and other online texts to gain insight into the contours and structure of the of the public sphere, examine how resources were deployed and power constituted, and the parameters of acceptable communicative action determined. Using this method to analyze the legal-regulatory structures in which the media operate and how the government viewed information, for example, as a public good or a state resource, reveals how societal structures are constructed, what mechanisms of control and discipline are used by the state, as well as points of contention.

I conducted a formal content analysis of 200 blogs, which included the blog(s) for every blogger I interviewed as well as many others that I determined to be important based on the

perception of other bloggers, the mainstream media and quantitative analytics or that were representative of various types of blogs. For each blogger I interviewed and several more whom I did not interview I created a backgrounder on his/her blog, profile, site statistics, posting frequency, average comments received, language, general subject matter and details of first post. Since there is a potentially infinite number of blogs, I developed a blog matrix to decide which blogs outside of those interviewed merited analysis. I also read countless other blogs, watched YouTube videos posted in the Egyptian blogosphere, and viewed countless Twitter and Facebook profiles, wall posts and update streams.

Each technique, with the exception of textual analysis, required different levels of access to people in the field. Most of my interviews and focus groups were lengthy, semi-structured and open-ended carried out primarily in-person but also via email, online chatting via Goggle chat or telephone/Skype where it was not possible to meet personally. When possible I conducted more than one interview and recorded and transcribed them. If I could not record the interviews, I took notes. Other interactions were more spontaneous or involved participating in activities like blogger conferences, contentious episodes such as the April 8 or May 4, 2008 "Facebook" strikes, demonstrations in downtown Cairo, and informal gatherings.[17] In these cases I captured my observations in fieldnotes or on my blog.

In participant observation the researcher subjects oneself "to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation" by becoming close to ones subjects and their situations (Goffman 2001, 154). Or as others call it "advanced hanging out" (Gottlieb 2006, 49). Experiencing through participant observation is the most scientific of methods according to

[17] These dates mark key episodes of contention that I analyze in depth in a latter chapter

Gans, because by allowing people to get close to those being it observed "it allows researchers to observe what people do, while all the other empirical methods are limited to reporting what people say about what they do" (1999, 540). My research emphasized participation or observation depending on the situational context of the moment and the type of access I negotiated (Emerson and Pollner 2001). Whereas media content can be studied via content analysis, statistical analysis, or other nomothetic quantitative approaches, the practices and processes that result in the final product are hidden and thus require an ethnographic framework both to collect data and to conduct analysis.

I also subjected my experience working as a journalist in the Middle East and United States and as a blogger to observation and analysis, since as Glasner and Strauss note, insights formed through researcher's experience, even if not part of formal fieldwork, can nonetheless be valid as data if subjected to sensitivity of observer (1967, 252). Through participant observation I produced detailed fieldnotes and blog entries about my observations on the contextual specifics of their interactions, the way identity is constructed through interaction, and the positioning that occurs in response, as well as the cultural resources deployed to legitimate or delegitimate interactional practices (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I continued to blog and conduct research on cyberactivism beyond Egypt throughout the time I was writing the dissertation.

The theory generated from these "diverse slices of data on the same category" works better than when just from one kind of data and enable verification of online data that increases its reliability (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 68). Knowing the real person and their online persona, which was at times anonymous or pseudonymous, was an important aspect of this research that helped me understand identity strategies, such as anonymity or language choice, and motivation, which I could not have gotten at in the same way by knowing only one dimension. Interestingly

this posed little challenge, as most bloggers and cyberactivists were willing to meet up in person regardless of their anonymity choices. The epistemological implication of this approach is that the researcher knows the participants in different ways based on the type of medium she knows them through (Orgad 2005, 62).

Throughout my research I blogged and kept detailed fieldnotes in which I sought to "capture and preserve indigenous meanings" and focus on interactional details and social practices that I observed or participated in each day (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995, 10-14). These fieldnotes created a textual account of embodied, lived experience and practices (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I wrote up the fieldnotes each day on my computer and stored them in one file or posted a blog. For each interview I transcribed the digital audio files or handwritten notes from my interviews, conferences and focus groups into Microsoft Word. Once I was confident that I had achieved theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967) I began coding these textual recountings of embodied experience.

Gaining Access

Gaining access to a particular field first requires defining the field of inquiry, an exercise that presents new methodological challenges in the Internet era. In some respect I had to continually seek to define and negotiate the field in which I was conducting fieldwork (Emerson and Pollner 2001). As discussed, my fieldwork took place in two locations simultaneously. I had to be physically located in Egypt to be able to observe journalists and bloggers at work and to fully understand the conditions under which they work, the hierarchies that structure their fields of practice, and the practices they undertake. But since I was studying bloggers I also had to conduct participant observation and content analysis in the blogosphere, where their identities as

bloggers, cyberactivists and citizen journalists were enacted and cyberactivism practices observable.

I employed different strategies to gain access to the real and the virtual, though as technology progressed over the four years I conducted research I found myself using access strategies in different and overlapping ways, as detailed in the case study below. Reading the interwoven connections of society necessarily implicates the researcher, who occupies a location in social space that influences what is seen (Emerson 2001; Geertz 2000a; Lévi-Strauss 1966). Thus my experience working as a journalist and blogger informed my interaction with the subjects and topic of this research. Having identified a few key organizations and individuals I wanted to interview based on my reading and research, I went into the embodied field to begin seeking physical access to them. The communities of journalists and bloggers I wanted to study were loosely formed and relatively unorganized, so there was no particular gatekeeper or point of access (Adler and Adler 1994). When I first went "into the field" in 2006 I was focused on getting to know professional journalists and their professional worlds in Egypt at a time when blogging had only just begun to make its presence felt there. By 2007 blogs were becoming part of the media systems, so the "field" was quite different than before. I chose informants based on two criteria. First, I identified bloggers who were quoted or referenced in the media, or by other bloggers on their blogrolls or in conversation. Second, I used snowballing to gain access to others in the informant's networks and to bloggers who were never in the media and who were not part of the liberal cyberactivist community, particularly among the Arabic-speaking bloggers and Muslim Brotherhood and Muslim Sisters. The networks of these informants "grew to form the outline of the … community" (Singerman 1995, 18).

Trust is essential for gaining access so I drew on my academic, journalistic and familial networks to get assistance in obtaining contact information for the people I wanted to interview (Feldman, Bell, and Berger 2003) . Occasionally a professor or journalist would send an email introduction or a blogger would use the "suggest a friend" feature on Facebook to put me in touch with a potential informant. I also made lists of people who had been quoted or interviewed on matters related to my research because I felt this indicated a willingness to talk and thus that I would have an easier time gaining access. Yet I found physical access was difficult to set up in advance and thus did almost all my networking once I physically arrived in the field, armed with a few email addresses and some names.

Facebook emerged midway through my research as a significant extension of the blogosphere where friends communicate and build asabiyah, play games, arrange social activities and share social documentation like photos and video. It is a place of social interaction where things/events/movements are produced, perceived, and interpreted and thus formed a "key field of investigation" as well (Geertz 2000a, 7). Being in the field required extension into this domain since processes and mechanisms of identity formation, mobilization, and activism took place or passed through this electronic space. Thus I gained access to in-person interviews and activities by becoming a part of their virtual social world as a peripheral member (Adler and Adler 1994, 380). I occasionally made initial contact through Facebook, briefly introducing my research, and myself and asking if they would be willing to chat online or off. Usually, however, I found a friend request waiting for me after an interview or agreed to add an informant during the interview. Towards the end I found myself initiating the process, veering more towards participation in the participation/observation continuum (Emerson and Pollner 2001).

Reflexivity

During interviews I would often ask participants questions that had come about because a topic was consistently mentioned in some manner or had been brought up in conversation with others and seemed to offer insight into a particularly interesting process or identity. Other questions were somewhat standard, such as why they started blogging or their choice of language, since I wanted to collect as many stories as possible and do some analysis of commonalities and differences that could help explain and categorize as well as to trace paths of influence. But sometimes the questions became part of the dynamic process of the researcher's influence in the very thing she is studying. For example, when I was discussing why a Muslim Brotherhood blogger chose to write in Arabic versus English I was trying to understand who he was hoping to influence based on his choice of linguistic audience. But he interpreted my question as a value statement, a recommendation to blog in English, which was not the intention.

> *Him:* Look. I'm a student. I'm a senior student (at university). I'm studying engineering. And the whole thing, the activities and taking pictures, uploading, and trying to write stuff, it takes a lot of time so I don't want to get an 'F' in my courses. So I try to focus, and I try to tell some others to do this, too. But sure, I will really, I'm serious, I'll think about this.
> *Me*: I'm not telling you what to do, I'm just asking
> *Him*: Yeah, I know

Since many bloggers tended to be rather ambitious, as I discuss later on, especially among the college-aged youth, they have often requested advice from me on their future trajectories or English skills. For example, many undergraduate bloggers asked me about schools or conferences in the United States and advice on how to apply to programs or scholarships. Others kept in contact via social media and requested feedback on writing samples. For the most part this came after I left the physical field. As a researcher I asked them to give me, for free, their stories and thoughts on a key phenomenon of their generation. I asked them personal

questions and often spent significant time with them, even staying for several days with one Muslim Brotherhood member in Sharqiya who helped arrange interviews for me with other young MB members despite risk to her safety and security. I felt the least I could do in return was to respond in kind.

In fact, there was at times a marked difference between bloggers who were active in 2006 and continued to actively blog in 2008. I communicated with several of the same bloggers during my two field studies, and even during the six months I spent in Egypt in 2008. By mid-2008 several of the most famous bloggers were tired of talking about blogging and their role to the plethora of media and researchers writing about the same topic. Some even refused to do interviews anymore. Alaa Abdel Fatah, one of Egypt's first and most famous bloggers, told me at a workshop on "The Internet and Human Rights" that brought together bloggers, journalists and human rights activists from around the region to share experiences across generations, that he was sick of being asked the same questions and talking about the same thing over and over (Abdel Fattah 2008a). Many of the people writing about "Egyptian blogging" came to Cairo and did interviews with the same five to ten most famous bloggers in which they asked many of the same questions and assumed revolutionary import to a phenomenon many of Egypt's leading cyberactivists thought was hyped beyond what it deserved. There were also undergraduates from across the world, especially Sweden, doing short field projects for their thesis because they received generous funding for such projects and were interested in new media, having grown up with it. By April 2008, several of the activist bloggers, those who had captured the most media attention and were thus caught in a professionally perpetuated process of speaking for Egyptian bloggers, would no longer talk to researchers or journalists. Having communicated with many of them a year-and-a-half earlier (before blogging became the story *du jour*) and showing up at

demonstrations, meetings, conferences and personal private spaces like homes, helped build credibility and trust and gain access. But it also meant that I was part of the process by which this blasé attitude had come into being and had contributed to the reification of Egyptian blogging in the media by writing about it academically and journalistically, in the press and on my blog.

Data Analysis

As my research progressed I began to think that some of these youth would become the leaders of their generation. And since I wanted to understand the impact of cyberactivism and social media within the political field, I needed to examine influential as well as non-influential cyberactivists. I used triangulation to arrive at the assessment of a blog's influence: Technorati and Alexa ratings, the amount of activity on a blog, and the opinions of bloggers and journalists in terms of which ones they thought were important. For some of the important blogs I ran comparative Alexa analytics and Technorati ratings to obtain a more detailed description of the blog's network and an objective, quantitative assessment of the blog's importance.[18] These analytics were run in 2008 and sporadically throughout the period of study, but interestingly there was remarkable consistency among the most influential cyberactivists throughout the period of study, and I explain why in a latter section. These were guideposts, however, and simply helped provide a technical certification of what I was finding in the field.

In grounded theory the moments of data collection and analysis occur simultaneously as immersion in the empirical world leads to the creation of analytic categories derived from the data and the continual processes of interpretation, creation of abstract conceptual categories, and

[18] Alexa (http://www.alexa.com) and Technorati (http://www.technorati.com) are free online services that offer analytics based on traffic to the site and other statistics for particular domains. This research took place prior to many of the social media analytical tools and big data analysis tools were available.

identification of patterns and relationships that emerge from data collection and analysis. The hermeneutic process of collection and analysis enabled me to follow up on questions that emerged throughout my research and further develop themes and categories as they emerged. Grounded theory was a particularly suitable approach given the episodic nature of my fieldwork. Furthermore, such an inductive methodology was particularly useful since there were no existing studies on Egyptian blogging and relatively few scholarly examinations of blogging outside of an American context.

I employed open coding, reading text to decide what was happening rather than imposing predetermined codes on the data (Charmaz 2001; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Gibbs 2007; Glaser and Strauss 1967). Since I sought to examine the social construction of the blogosphere and bloggers both on and offline it makes little sense to impose pre-defined codes developed within a uses and gratifications framework (Papacharissi 2002; Trammell et al. 2006) for random selections of blogs created in other cultures and languages. Since the topic was so new and blogs had only existed for a few years when I began my study, there were but a handful of scholarly articles on the topic and none on the Egyptian blogosphere. The systematic construction of codes as descriptive units of analysis was based on the configurations between on and offline identities, processes and issues of concern. This was a dialectical process (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995, 148) that involved relating and distinguishing events and social practices. As Emerson et al. note: "Qualitative coding is a way of opening up avenues of inquiry: the researcher identifies and develops concepts and analytic insights through close examination of and reflection on the fieldnote data…[to] identify, elaborate, and refine analytic insights from and for the interpretation of data" (1995, 151).

Writing blogs during data collection also helped me to "identify, develop, and modify broader analytic themes and arguments" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995, 157). This process of writing fieldnotes, coding them, and writing memos in the form of blogging was a process of "reflexive or dialectical interplay between theory and data whereby theory enters in at every point, shaping not only analysis but how social events come to be perceived and written up as data in the first place" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995, 167). During the analysis stage I integrated findings from my different sources – interviews, fieldnotes, blog texts, secondary sources and notes (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006).

Part III: Notes on Application of the Method

The Mechanics of Doing Research

Doing research in the Arab world was usually easier than doing similar research in the United States. In American there often seems to be skepticism and inherent distrust toward the qualitative social scientist, especially those whose methods appear similar to those of journalists, a profession that has lost much respect over the past few years (Kennedy and Moen 2007; The state of the news media 2007). In the United States it seems one must go through a secretary to arrange an interview or call the press secretary for an official version of events. Business phone numbers and emails are used while mobile phone numbers and personal emails are guarded much more closely. Although research guides often advise sending letters to make initial contact (which are increasingly sent via email anyway) the researcher must assess the best way to make initial contact based on the cultural practices and norms of the community they hope to study (Feldman, Bell, and Berger 2003). In the Arab world, however, people do not seem to be as possessive and obsessive about their personal information and will much more readily give you a

mobile phone number and a personal email. Most journalists, though they have email accounts, did not seem to respond to email messages consistently and were far more accessible via mobile phone. While few Americans would dream of giving out a friend's cell phone number, once I established rapport with a research subject I found they were often more than willing to provide me with personal contact information for people to which they had access. Mobile phone numbers for even the most senior level officials and executives were easily obtainable from interviewees, perhaps because of the traditions of Arab hospitality, and initial contact made via phone implies a level of *wasta* (connections) sufficient enough to at least get in the door. Phones also have the benefit of not leaving a paper trail.

Wasta

Wasta can be loosely translated as connections. In a society where informal networks are institutionalized throughout all class levels *wasta* can be crucial for gaining access to these networks (Singerman 1995). Coming from the root meaning "to mediate" *wasta* is a term commonly used to indicate personal connections used to gain access for others. In the literature on *wasta* the term is usually used to refer to the use of personal connections to obtain a job, the intercession of someone on behalf of another to a higher authority, or the connections needed to conduct business (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1994, 1993; Hutchings and Weir 2006; Mohamed and Hamdy 2008). Although it is often used pejoratively and can carry negative connotations, *wasta* can also refer to the basic need to use personal connections to accomplish regular business and gain access to people not currently in one's network. As Rabo and Utas observed, *wasta* is based on trust in relations of friendship or patronage, in which anyone who has resources needed by another can become a mediator, or *wasiit*, and can seek or give *wasta* depending on the

circumstances (2005). They consider *wasta* as a resource relative to the perceived or real need for mediation (Rabo and Utas 2005, 119). In my research *wasta* meant using my connections to gain access to informants.

Accessing groups often required finding a key influential or point-person who would open the doors to others in their social network, essentially becoming conveyors of *wasta*. I also found this approach diminished concerns that I was a spy given the skepticism towards Americans – especially those who speak Arabic – as potential CIA agents (Mitchell 1993a, Ch. 6; Shehata 2006). Americans might call it "dropping names" though this often has a pejorative connotation. In oral, high-context societies intuition and anecdote are more acceptable as evidentiary claims than in low-context, literate societies (Zaharna 1995). Thus in my initial contact with a potential informant I would explain how I got his or her mobile number and how I knew that person and through whom I had met them etc. This was especially important when I cold-called potential informants. Since my informants were part of a relatively contained social category this meant that they often knew each other and thus my dropping of names helped establish my veracity as a researcher and one who could be trusted.

Virtual Wasta and Social Networking

More often than not people were interested in learning more about my research and setting up a meeting in person. Once I made initial contact I sought to create a stronger relationship in which I could gain access to that person's *wasta*. By my second research trip to Egypt I had joined Facebook, a social networking site that had become wildly popular in Egypt by the end of 2007 (The list 2008). I learned that Egyptians use Facebook to make friends and found that adding informants as "friends" and accepting their "friend" requests was good way to

enter their social worlds and was almost expected after an interview or meeting. To decline a request would be an insult. Some even questioned why my privacy settings were so high, preventing them from seeing any personal information about me prior to adding them to my "friends" list, since the vast majority of Egyptians on Facebook appear to have the lowest privacy settings possible. This means that anyone with an account can see their contact and background information, friend list, activities update, pictures and all other personal information on their site. This question often led to interesting conversations about privacy and cultural difference.

Although I was physically "out" of the field between research trips I was still "virtually" present in the field because of the nature of my research online, what Hine terms virtual ethnography (Hine 2000). The term virtual is problematic, however, since the blogosphere and cyberspace were integrated and implicated in the embodied world and practices of my informants. Another reason this term is problematic is because, as Bernard noted, all participant observation is fieldwork and thus observing participants on or offline should not detract from the scientific nature of such observation (quoted in Wolcott 2004, 81). Only through online observation could I come face-to-face with the virtual selves created in and inhabiting the blogosphere and cyberspace and the networks they created. Furthermore, only via online participation in the Egyptian blogosphere could I observe the dynamic practices that constituted cyberactivism, since practices like changing banners and updates on blogs or posting Facebook pictures and status updates are not archived and thus exist only temporarily. Similarly, the number of followers, subscribers, or friends changes over time and thus counting and making observations cannot be done retroactively. Similarly, tweets, hashtags, and trending topics are only available for a limited time period or observable as they occur.

Identity

Access is often dependent on the identity of the researcher, who is stuck with some identifiers like gender, age and race, but able to enact or invoke others depending on context, such as marital status and profession (Emerson and Pollner 2001; Warren 2001). Some of my "social attributes" (Emerson 2001, 116) such as being a white American were different than those of my informants, while others, such as being in my late twenties, were not (at least among bloggers). Insider-outsider roles are not a given, rather they are embedded within multiple social identities and their narration (Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont 2003, 41). Part of my approach to building trust, establishing my credentials, and putting my informant at ease was to seek asabiyah with them by drawing on particular parts of my identity that seemed relevant and similar to the person I was talking to or hoped to interview. At times this meant highlighting my identity as a journalist or as a student or as a blogger. Often this meant highlighting the ways in which I was "like them" in hopes of gaining insider status rather than simply being seen as a Western woman analyzing the Arab Other. By invoking particular personal characteristics at various times I attempted to shift from outsider to insider, enabling me to build trust with my informants and gain different perspectives. Of course I was aware that despite my attempts to negotiate my identity by emphasizing and de-emphasizing particular aspects of my identity, an identity is not entirely "up for grabs" (Shehata 2006, 258).

Nationality

On first glance, based upon my appearance, most of my research subjects assumed that I was an American and thus a Christian. From the outset it was usually assumed that I did not speak Arabic and had little knowledge of the Middle East, the Arab world, or Islam. This was not

because of any inherent animosity but rather an image created through media consumption and the effects of U.S. foreign policy in the region. Many of my informants, as people involved in the media field to some extent, were often acutely aware of the way that media frame and narrate Arab identity within Arab-Western relations, especially in the post-September 11 context. I often felt this initially limited my access both in terms of who would talk to me but also the topics we would cover. I wanted to get beyond the surface and in-depth into the subject matter but often felt hindered by the assumption that I was an American that needed to be educated in the basics; many informants were surprised by the depth of my knowledge of Egyptian and Arab politics, the teachings of Islam and the Arab media system. Perhaps because of my identity as a "student" or as a relatively young American, I saw informants recalculate who I was and how I should be engaged with as our conversation revealed that I was not the "typical American" they seemed to have assumed me to be.

Being American can be a difficult identity to negotiate in the Arab world because of the negative connotations of American foreign policy and imperialism, especially when attempting to access groups like the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafis because of American policies and discourse about these groups. Despite my identity as researcher, doctoral candidate and journalist in the region, I often felt that I needed to invoke my identity as an insider, as someone who was personally familiar with the culture and politics of the region. By stating my status as wife of a Muslim Arab I felt I was signaling that I am familiar with Arab culture, that I know not all Arabs or Muslims are terrorists, and that I am not plagued by the stereotypes they believe characterize most Americans' perceptions of Arabs/Muslims. My Arab Media blog was another way to dispel

these notions because it revealed my perspective and evaluation of many of these issues and was publicly available for bloggers to review if they felt so inclined.[19]

As other ethnographers and social scientists have noted, Westerners, and especially Americans, in the field, and especially the Arab Middle East, are often believed to be spies (Shehata 2006; Warren 2001). This concern helped me decide to use my real email address instead of an anonymized one so that the (potential) informant could ascertain that I was who I said I was by my email address and the signature line, which gave my contact information, website and blog URL. I had a description of my research and biography on my website and blog, which I felt made it less likely that I would be seen as a spy or government agent. Similarly, friending bloggers on Facebook and following via Twitter gave them access to my social network, which included many of the bloggers they knew or had heard of, and thus certified me as legitimate. Hearing me speak Arabic immediately challenged their preconceptions of who I was and what I represented, and almost always drew respect and surprise. Most Arabic speakers acknowledge the difficulty of the language, especially formal *fuhsa*, and freely admit that they themselves do not "speak Arabic well."

Language

Language was a key resource in gaining access not only to informants who were monolingual but also to bilingual informants. I also found that Arabic facilitated greater access to Muslim Brotherhood, *salafi* and Islamist bloggers. In my second field visit to Egypt, in 2008, more than half of my interviews were in Arabic and I was able to participate more fully than my first visit as my language skills had improved. I conducted interviews in Arabic, English and even French, depending on the preference of the informant, and often switched and mixed them

[19] http://arab-media.blogspot.com

up as we talked about different themes and topics that were better expressed in one language over the other. Although I conducted interviews in 2006 with Arabic-only speakers, I was forced to rely on a translator, which of course added an additional element into the researcher-informant relationship and interrupted the natural cadence of conversation. By the second research trip I was able to conduct interviews entirely in Arabic. I was also able to call people and introduce myself, my research and explicate the *isnad* in Arabic, which meant that my pool of informants was much bigger and people were generally impressed and interested by an American who could actually speak Arabic. My ability to speak Arabic and French enabled me to communicate with informants in the language, or languages, of their choice and to understand particular words or expressions that were best expressed in one language or the other. In addition to denoting my familiarity with their culture it enabled them to more fully express themselves in our interview because they could switch in and out of the language as it suited them and depending on the topic. For example, one informant told me that he preferred speaking and writing about democratization in English because this is the language from which the concepts emerge. Arabic proverbs and jokes, on the other hand, were best expressed in his native tongue.

Arabic also enabled me to access the non-English speaking portion of the Egyptian blogosphere, which grew significantly over the period of study because of expanding use as well as increased availability of Arabic-language platforms and interfaces. I was able to compare the linguistic strategies of different cyberactivists and see how these did or did not change over time, how these strategies were implicated in the activation of different mechanisms and strategies of contention.

Gender

Gender impacts access to some social groups in the Middle East and Arab world, specifically religious females. As a woman I was able to access both male and female populations I was studying whereas a male would not have been able to access the conservatively religious unmarried female bloggers. Such "cross-gender access," as Warren notes, is often more available to foreign women than native women (Warren 2001, 215). As a young, married female I was able to spend time alone and in the homes of female Muslim Brotherhood bloggers, for example. By mentioning that I was married, to an Arab and a Muslim nonetheless, I felt that I was eliminating sources of potential tension by implicitly indicating that I was not a wild Western girl tromping through the Middle East on her own, that I was not a threat to the unmarried girls and women or the single men, and that I was at least tangentially or honorifically "Arab."[20]

Being sensitive to how invocations of certain identities are perceived in a given national or professional culture can ease barriers to access. Even within a single interview or relationship with an informant I would draw on different aspects of my identity, highlighting my student status when I sought to gain information and diminish feelings of cultural imperialism or focusing on my identity as a blogger when interviewing other bloggers. At times I wanted to emphasize my experience as a journalist so that we could talk in the journalistic parlance that characterizes the journalistic field and discuss more deeply some of the conceptual issues about the role of journalists in society and norms of journalistic professionalism. Deploying my journalistic identity, however, risked putting the informant on the defensive, especially if I mentioned having worked for the *New York Times*, since this is seen as a respectable and

[20] I was referred to several times as half-Arab by my informants, which signaled acceptance and inclusion.

enviable place to work reserved for the best journalists. Thus if I mentioned my previous work I emphasized that I had worked for both the *New York Times* and the *Daily Star* in Lebanon, and later Al Arabiya in Dubai, demonstrating that I respected and was experienced with both Arab and American journalism but without making a distinction or value judgment about either.

Access and the Political Environment

Despite the relative opening of the media environment in the Arab world over the past decade, journalists and bloggers continue to face personal and professional intimidation, from repressive press laws and penal codes to detention and arrest (Radsch 2007b, 2008b). During the period of my research the imprisonment of journalists and bloggers was an all-too-common occurrence in a country where the government uses brute force, from torture to harassment to fines, to enforce its authority over communication space and the media. National security loomed large in the communication environment in Egypt, where the Mubarak government is focused on protecting the regime and the political status quo. Bloggers and cyberactivists were targeted by the Egyptian state for their activism initially and eventually for their writing. Being aware of the environment in which my research subjects lived and worked was critical not only to gaining access as a researcher and protecting their safety, but also to ensuring my own safety as I sought to immerse myself in a world so sensitive to state authorities and thus potentially dangerous to myself and my subjects. Making sure that my informants were aware of my efforts to maintain the security of my data through password protection and encryption was an important part of preserving access, credibility and safety. Yet more often than not the knowledge that their opinions and insights would be part of the discourse on media effects in the region gave them a

sense of empowerment, and many refused to remain anonymous because this would only be another way for the state to silence them.

Conclusion: Gaining Access to Egyptian Bloggers

As described above I conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups and had lots of informal chats and coffees with informants, and when possible conducted participant observation of events and practices. Watching how journalists and bloggers were involved in an event, such as the April 6, 2008 General and Facebook Strike or the Press Syndicate protests, gave me a much more nuanced understanding of what happened than interviews alone (Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont 2003, 100). Of course some events were unobservable because they happened in the past or while I was not in the field, in which case I had to rely on the accounts obtained through interviews and on blogs. Furthermore, because bloggers engage in blogging at random, unspecific times and often in the privacy of their homes or in between day-to-day activities, I rarely observed blogging *per se* but rather their interactions and activism as people who were bloggers rather than the actual task of sitting down to write. Tweeting, on the other hand, was far more observable since it could be done quickly and easily via mobile phone.

On a few occasions, however, I did have the opportunity to observe the act of blogging, though the significance was more in the context in which the need to blog at a particular moment arose than it was about watching someone type away at their computer. In one case I had cultivated a relationship with a particular Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated blogger: visiting his university, meeting for coffee, exchanging emails and information about events one or the other might be interested in attending. This blogger was going to bring his friend, who was also a

blogger of consequence in the Brotherhood, to meet me at a café. As I was on my way he called me and told me to bring my computer. When I arrived he got online but we had to change the language settings to Arabic so that he could navigate his blog. His friend and fellow blogger had been arrested the day before and he had written a post about it. But his friend and the lawyers said he should take the post offline because the blogger had been transferred to state security and they were afraid that the blog post could put him in greater danger because it talked about a previous arrest and work as a blogger, putting lots of potentially incriminating evidence (from the government's perspective) in a cohesive article that would make it much easier for security to discover than if they had to dig it out for themselves. Shortly thereafter he received a call that the blogger had been tortured and that the security officials had asked about his own blog. This scene demonstrated to me that all interactions with bloggers whether in a formal interview setting or not were always opportunities for participant observation since a blogger could enact this identity at any time; any experience or observation was potential fodder for the blog, a Facebook update or a tweet. Furthermore, my willingness to help was a commitment act that helped build rapport and trust with these informants (Geertz 1979, 85).

Getting beyond the interview stage and into the community I wanted to study was a mixture of luck and strategy. Often I found that just by being in the right place and being willing to ask for access was sufficient to gain entree after making initial contact. Perhaps because of the public nature of their jobs and often personas or their comfort working with people and taking information from them, my informants were often more than happy to bring me into their worlds, allowing me to see them enacting their roles as journalists or bloggers. For example, on the day of the Qana massacre in Lebanon, I was in Al Jazeera's Cairo bureau for what was supposed to

be an interview with the bureau chief.[21] But because of breaking news he was out. Instead of squandering my trip there I found a journalist willing to sit and talk. As we wrapped up he told me he had to run and he and his camera crew got into the elevator as I did. Where are you going? I asked. He told me he was going to cover the march by opposition members of the Egyptian parliament to the Arab League. I asked him if I could go and for the next few hours I was able to observe journalists in action, *doing* journalism in a way that no interview will ever convey. The willingness to take a leap and ask for access was critical to my success.

Strategy also played an equally important role. If I wanted to be considered a part of their world I needed to be invited into it. Thus I sought to be seen over and over in places where journalists and bloggers congregated. I attended press conferences, workshops, finagled invitations to events and basically tagged along whenever possible. I sought to be as involved with this very loosely defined community, a community often only enacted at particular moments, by being in places where they were likely to enact their identities as journalists or bloggers and discover asabiyah. Furthermore, the longevity of my research, multiple visits to the field and sustained engagement through virtual ethnographic methods was a form of certification that facilitated access and acceptance. My "embeddedness" in the blogger community also gave me access to unpublicized events and prompted others to help me gain access to other potential participants. Bloggers and cyberactivists, in particular, were hyper connected via mobile phones and Internet applications, tools used in the real and virtual spaces they occupy. New technologies were the gateway to participation so I joined listservs, social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, and kept track of the announcements made on the websites of human rights centers. My presence at an intimate workshop with twelve of the most famous bloggers I was invited to by an

[21] The Qana massacre is what the Arab media called the July 30, 2006 attack by Israel on a village in Lebanon that killed 28 people, more than half of whom were children.

academic colleague prompted one blogger to tell me "You're everywhere!" Because many such events were public they offered an opportunity to observe without participating and without having to expend any resources to gain access.

I gained access and conveyed trust by participating in the blogging life of activists, attending their meetings, conferences and events. At a conference on blogging and human rights early on in my fieldwork I met the famous and influential Egyptian bloggers in a 'safe' environment where I established my credentials as a devoted researcher. Accessing key influential people also helped me gain access to others in the community. And unlike some other researchers who passed through and attended a session here or there, I attended the entire nine hours both days. Not only did this give me an opportunity to chat with them and establish connections that I could follow up with for interviews, but I could also observe them, their interactions and the points of agreement and contention among them in a way that is not necessarily manifested in their virtual life on their blogs. By the end of the conference I had been accepted as one of the participants and was included in the final group photograph. And just as I wanted to talk to them, many of them wanted to talk to me so that we became subjects of each other. In some ways I was able to enact a form of informational *wasta* in terms of navigating some of the complexities of American academia or providing an interview on my area of expertise. A few of my informants hoped to apply for graduate school in the United States and asked me for advice and information, which I was happy to give.

A turning point came in March, 2008, when rumors that a general strike was planned in the country's largest textile factory in Mahalla started to spread and calls for a solidarity strike began appearing on Facebook and talked about by cyberactivists. I joined the April 6 General Strike Facebook page and quickly saw the numbers grow and bloggers begin to organize

coverage strategies for that day. The day before the strike I went from primarily an observer to a participant-observer and became part of the real and virtual community I was studying. It began with a text message from a blogger I had interviewed months before who was also one of the first Egyptian bloggers and an activist: "Arrests started already. Blogger Malek of malek-x.net and 3 activists from Islamist Labour Party taken to Masr al-Qadima police station for distributing fliers." This text message made me feel that I had reached a threshold where I was ready to be accepted into the group. At this point I chose to more fully immerse myself as a participant in order to observe how political activism actually took place, how bloggers activated their networks, publicized their efforts and enacted their roles as citizen journalists. I sent messages about what I saw on the streets out to the network via Twitter and wrote blog posts about the strike and my observations, linking to other bloggers and receiving comments from them on my posts. Because of the trust I had built over the months I was granted access to the activist network, receiving the text messages, Twitter updates and emails that detailed the mechanisms and processes by which bloggers activate their networks and enabling me to see the structures of these networks. I initially planned to go to Mahalla, the site of the worker's strike, with several journalists and bloggers who were planning on going to document the anticipated violence. Although an informant had agreed to help me get there, several also warned that it was dangerous and that they themselves were not going to go. I think that my interest and willingness to go proved my commitment to the group and helped further entrench my acceptance and inclusion among this particular group of bloggers. Yet it also underscored the need to draw lines and at times resist seeking access when it put personal safety at risk. Sometimes just because a door opens the researcher must assess whether she should enter. It also gave me a visceral

understanding of the personal danger these activists faced that I do not think would have been nearly as evident had I relied solely on textual accounts.

My level of engagement enabled me to accomplish my research objectives but also presented limitations that I sought to address and dispel. First, getting too friendly with a particular participant could risk alienating others and blocking access because of the personal dynamics between what is in fact a relatively small community. This was especially true within the activist bloggers group and between the liberals and the Muslim Brotherhood bloggers. Thus participating while maintaining an analytical perspective enabled participants to trust me while helping me to maintain the balance between participation and distance required for an academic perspective in which the attempt at objectivity is valued.

Doing research in countries with tumultuous or repressive political systems poses challenges to the investigator and informants alike, but often gaining access comes down to the simple basics of building relationships. Online and mobile technologies can be particularly helpful in establishing the initial links needed to gain access because they offer a communicative space outside of the view of the authorities and provides an easy way to make initial contact and begin establishing ones *bone fides*. Once the researcher is familiar with the political and cultural context of the fieldwork sites, access becomes a matter of accessing personal networks by deploying relevant and strategic aspects of one's identity.

Issues of access cannot be separated from nationality, which affects the ability of the researcher to obtain funding for particular types of research in particular countries as well as whether that person will be granted a visa to enter the country. Changes in the security situation on the ground can have real and profound impacts on the research project. Egypt was relatively open given its dependence on tourism. Once on the ground in-country, using modern technology

and information tools to discover potential access or initial contact opportunities makes access easier to obtain since the only resource needed in many cases is the basic information about time and place. Furthermore, using publicly available information sources also protects those being observed since they do not have to establish any relationship with the researcher.

In many ways access was not only something my informants gave me but gave themselves, refusing to be silenced by an oppressive state. Bloggers resoundingly told me that they started blogging because they wanted to express themselves. They had something to say but nowhere to say it in a state where the media system was under the heavy hand of the state and average citizens had little access to the airwaves. Marginalized populations like the youth of the Muslim Brotherhood, homosexuals, and Bahai lacked traditional media outlets and opportunities to control their political representation; they said that with no newspapers and the inability to even express themselves at times in their own homes, online media and interest by researchers was empowering and demonstrated the effects of these media. The profound need to express oneself publicly coupled with the desire to effect change in their societies was reflected in the willingness to talk openly and "on-the-record" about their experiences. Their refusal to remain silent and muzzled made access something they seemed to want to give because it would enable them to gain something for themselves and for the cause of freedom of expression.

Whereas blogging in general became a form of individual empowerment and had effects on the individual's conceptualization of the possible and habituated them to regularly being able to express themselves publicly, citizen journalism was a specific mode of blogging and type of cyberactivism that was outward focused and which aimed to have an external impact and in particular situated the subject in the journalistic field and the power dynamics thereof. Chapter Four therefore focuses on citizen journalism as an activist strategy made possible by new ICTs

and analyzes its political impact. But before turning to this particular repertoire of contention, it is important to understand the technoinstitutional dynamics of Egypt during the time of study and the legal architecture that conditioned choices and responses. It is to this we turn in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

LEGAL REGULATORY DISCIPLINING OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

"I used to think that they always portrayed Lady Justice as a woman who wears a blindfold to show that she is impartial. Now I think she wears that blindfold because she can't look us in the eye anymore" – Sandmonkey

One of the questions that emerges from the analysis of the political impact of cyberactivists and their increasingly oppositional political role is why Mubarak did not censor the Internet and why he allowed bloggers and cyberactivists to operate at all. The previous section explained how the arrests of bloggers led to amplification and certification in the global media and rights community, analyzing how harsh repression carried significant reputational costs that could lead to decertification of Egypt as a modern, developed, economically attractive country. Such crackdowns also increased asabiyah within the blogger community and had the contradictory effect of helping to grow the blogosphere because of this solidarity, as opposed to making people more afraid of joining, as was the case in some countries. The following section analyses several factors that shaped the Egyptian state's approach and the choices made in the telecommunications and legal spheres that created a level of path dependency that constrained its options and impacted Mubarak's calculus of control. It argues that conceptions of the public sphere, citizenship and the role of the press influenced economic, infrastructural and legal choices, and that these normative claims of the legal regulatory architecture became sites of contention.

Under Mubarak, the public sphere in Egypt was based on a cultural notion of the Egyptian nation, as opposed to the Muslim *umma*, as inherently limited and sovereign and thus

as exclusive and in need of protection from outside influences by the state. In 1981 when Mubarak came to power he allowed opposition publications, but continued indirect control through laws and litigation while encouraging a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic role for press (Ramaprasad and Hamdy 2006). In 1992, following attacks by Islamists, the media was reigned in to safeguard national security, but then shifted to preserving Arab-Islamic identity after 1998 (Sakr 2001b). The residue of colonialism and empire still remain in the prohibitions against criticizing the government and religion. Egypt's constitution, for example, reflected a cultural interpretation of rights built around nationalist and essentialist principles of what it meant to be Egyptian. It defined Egypt as Arab, Islamic, and socialist[22] with "social solidarity" forming the basis of society.[23] Thus the constitution enshrined political and cultural identity as the basis on which the state was founded and from which rights emanated. This is important because if information undermines solidarity, or asabiyah, it must be anti-social and harmful to the nation, thus justifying limitations on its communication. Such reasoning was found throughout the legal code.

Both constitutional and media laws reflected an essentialist view of culture as a national possession that must be protected. So, for example, there were legal limits on foreign ownership, requirements for the nationality of content producers, specifications about the duties and roles of journalists, and specific reference to the importance of upholding cultural values and unity. Yet these cultural criteria often conflicted with the fundamentally liberal framework of the telecommunications and audiovisual laws, which promoted privatization and liberalization of the media sectors as part of WTO and other international treaty agreements (e.g. TRIPPS). Those

[22] Articles 1 and 2

[23] Article 7

criteria also clashed with the more liberal, interpretive values of the blogosphere and citizen media, putting the normative conceptualization of what citizenship meant in these different fora at odds with each other. Furthermore, the need for private sector development and foreign direct investment increasingly challenged the nationalist model of regulation as globalization and the informatization of the economy continued unabated throughout the period of study, as I discuss in the ensuing chapter.

Since the creation and definition of public space requires the narration of culture, media play an especially vital role in constructing and perpetuating the identity of the 'nation', and therefore the state can claim justification for "defensive violence," like censorship and narrow legal limits for free expression, against the media. This does not imply that the state did not use offensive violence as well, as the regime was constantly trying to strike the right balance of repression and progress. The constitutional tension between granting Egyptians the right of free expression while invoking the need to maintain national security and cultural integrity and the perpetual state of emergency during Mubarak's presidency allowed him to abrogate that right. But it also forced him to make a tradeoff between competing objectives of maintaining control and liberalizing the ICT sector. As Venturelli points out, "cultural notions of public space implicitly incorporate the legitimation of defensive violence against threats to narratives of cultural self, construction, sustained by the reification of progressively essentializing notions of culture derived from the dynamic construction of social origins" (1998, 62). It appeared somewhat easier to liberalize and privatize the telecom sector than, for example, the audiovisual sector because telecom focuses on the means of transmission and reception rather than content.

ICT policies driven by international organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and those promoted by the American

democratization push from 2004 to 2006 overwhelmingly endorsed liberalization, privatization, deregulation and competition as the answer to socioeconomic development, political progress and conformity with "international" norms (Mittelman 2000; Stiglitz 2002). These hegemonic Western orthodoxies force states to make difficult choices and trade-offs between protection of national-cultural values and competition, universal access and unequal development, and cultural protectionism that often masks a more pernicious argument about information control (Sakr 2001a). They can also restrain a state's desire to use offensive violence against its citizenry because of the economic stakes, the potential that repression will decertify the country as progressive and business-friendly. Although Sakr argues that that such neoliberal orthodoxy maintains the status quo, the emphasis on reducing state control coupled with the emphasis on information and communication technology development favored the emergence of a public space *dehors d'etat* and the public's ability to take advantage of this space. It also made it more politically and economically costly for Mubarak to take steps that would undermine this orthodoxy, such as implementing mass filtering capabilities.

Investigating the theoretical underpinnings of the legal and regulatory approaches adopted by the government may seem removed from the more immediate concerns about development, repression, and political rights. But these theories have real consequences by constructing communicative spaces that make certain actions possible and favor the formation of certain norms. These communicative spaces give rise to the public sphere. As Castells notes: "The media, in the broadest sense, are the public space of our time: the space in which, and by which, societies exist as social forms of shared experience" (Castells 2004, 223). These deterritorialized, mediated spaces became inextricably linked with the embodied public spaces in which cyberactivists demonstrated and protested, from Tahrir Square to the steps of the Press

Syndicate. Many of the bloggers who were arrested during protests and demonstrations, as I discuss in greater detail in the three following chapters, were targeted because of their digital activism in mediated public space.

Media institutions have organic relationships with society, politics and thus take on the "form and coloration of the social and political structures" as well as legal structures of a given society (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1973, 1). Politics effect media and vice versa in an iterative feedback loop of mutual influence. Therefore when a distributional shift in the technologies by which we communicate takes place, there may be a corresponding impact on sociopolitical structures and institutions. Telecom policies thus become sites of conflict between different social and political interests, even though the content industry is often more difficult to deal with (Venturelli 1998, 458).

Controlling the mass media was a significant focus for Mubarak's regime, as for most authoritarian governments, but it had to be balanced against other, competing interests such as implementing economic liberalization, creating the perception of democratic reform, attracting foreign capital, and improving development. Mubarak ruled through a mixture of coercion, patronage and manipulation, and had to contend with conflicting policy approaches that advanced some goals while making others more difficult to achieve (Singerman 1995). The intersection of legal and regulatory choices, media reform, economic liberalization and privatization, and ICT development exemplify the tension inherent in seeking growth and progress while attempting to maintain control in a new media ecosystem. For example, the regulatory and legal environments in Egypt were structured so as to maintain the political status quo while permitting greater investment and service provision through liberalization. These principles were codified in the press, telecommunications, and audiovisual laws even as the

government was required to adopt liberalization and privatization strategies as required by Egypt's accession to the WTO and in order to attract foreign investment (Hafez 2001a; Sakr 2001a, 2001b).

The State-Media Dynamic

Gramsci called the media the most dynamic part of the ideological structure of the ruling class because of their direct and indirect influence on public opinion, a sentiment that many Arab leaders shared (Gramsci 1992, 52-53, 143). Coercion was costly and could fuel a backlash, so manipulating public sentiment was a key strategy for maintaining some level of stability and lowering the costs of outright repression. Arab states traditionally used media outlets to portray the regime in a particular way, while non-state players owned media to advance their political views or parties. As the dominant form of communication in the later part of the 20th century, television was one of the most important mechanisms used by authoritarian states like Egypt to manipulate domestic public opinion because of its overwhelming symbolic power, agenda-setting capabilities and ability to transcend illiteracy gave it a monopoly on what "goes into the heads" of most people (Abu-Lughod 2001; Hafez 2001a; Schleifer 2006). Broadcasting outlets, therefore, were state-owned and comprised a dynamic part of the ruling class (Gramsci 1992; Rugh 2004).

All terrestrial television broadcasting in Egypt during the period of study was state-controlled, with the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) dominating the broadcasting scene by maintaining full or partial ownership of all news stations including terrestrial television news stations ERTU 1 and ERTU 2, satellite channels Egyptian Television and NileTV, and

radio news stations Arab Republic of Egypt General Service, Voice of the Arabs, and Greater Cairo Radio; independent news broadcasters were few and far between (Bassiouni 2006; BBC 2005). Television was historically used as an instrument of national development and education, but suffered from one-way information flows, superficiality, overabundance of protocol news, and hyper-positivism while permitting suppression of opposition views (Ayish 2001, 126-127, 129). It has even been argued that television "journalism," if we conceptualize journalism as an independent field with a set of professional practices and agreed upon norms, in the Arab world did not exist prior to the new millennium (Schleifer 2006). Although people could interpret and make what they want of information they received, the primacy of visual proof in contemporary society and a message framed as "news" wields significant symbolic power. Therefore controlling this symbolic power has been the policy of Arab governments ever since the introduction of mass media into the region (Abu-Lughod 2001; Bourdieu 1991, 1998; Darras 2005; Kraidy and Murphy 2003).

Mainstream media in Egypt are not dominated by economic logic but rather by political logic, and the primary task of the indigenous Arab media was to create public opinion and successful communication from the state to society (Hafez 2001b, 2; Rugh 2004, 2007). Law 13 of 1979, which established the Egyptian Radio and Television Union, mandated that Egyptian media play a pivotal role in national development and government policy aimed to make television sets as available as possible (Boyd 1999, 7). There were the official government mouthpiece newspapers like *Al Ahram*, *Rose al-Youssef*, the English and French-language daily *Egyptian Gazette*/G*azette d'Egypte* and the high-end *al-Qahira* as well as publications with more informal government ties like *al-Usbu*. Several partisan dailies like *Nahdet Masr* and weeklies including *al-Karama*, *al-Ghad*, and *al-Araby*, competed with those of less determinate political

ideology such as *al-Fagr* and *Sawt al-Umma*. In the early to mid-2000s, however, a handful of new independent newspapers emerged and challenged the state newspapers and became important allies to the reform movement. Three of the most important new players in the journalistic field that interacted with the blogosphere were the independent daily *Al Masry Al Yaom*, the liberal tabloid *Al Destor* and the left-leaning, short-lived *Al Badeel*, which were important players in the certification and amplification of citizen journalism, as I explain in greater detail in Chapter Four. The English-language *Daily Star Egypt*, a partnership between the Lebanese publishers of Lebanon's *Daily Star* and several Egyptian businessmen was also granted a license in 2005, though with its limited circulation as an insert to the *International Herald Tribune* the government did not interfere much in its editorial line.[24]

These independent dailies also exemplified the increasing independence of the media, propelled by the satellite news phenomenon, and its confrontational approach to the political field (Radsch 2007b). The proliferation of news outlets made possible by privatization, liberalization and the powerful effects of specific actors like *Al Masry Al Yaom*, *Al Jazeera* in professionalizing the press helped pull the field away from state control and alter its operational logic, particularly through the mechanisms of journalistic competition and professionalization. And as one publisher put it, "once you have credibility, you can move towards accountability" (Kassem 2006).

Several private satellite stations also went online in 2001, the same year Al Jazeera became an internationally renowned news network. As with many developing countries, Egypt saw satellites, and later Internet connectivity, as symbols of modernity and leadership, making the aspirational and prestige aspects of such technology a desirable aspect of national identity.

[24] Based on discussions with journalists at the paper in focus groups and individually in 2006 and 2008.

Having these ICTs were a way of keeping pace with other world cultures and compensating for Egypt's so-called backwardness and high-illiteracy rates (Bassiouni 2006). They could help certify Egypt as a modern country. Egypt also saw the development of its own satellite as a way to secure its place in space since the country was initially not part of the Arab League's Arabsat following Sadat's peace treaty with Israel. After the 1991 Gulf War, and the resulting economic boom, the push for media development intensified and helped improve access and challenge government monopolies (Sreberny 2001). Egypt's first international television channel launched in 1991 on Egyptian Space Channel (Spacenet), although the "mad rush" into satellite broadcasting did not begin until 1994, just a few years after the Arab world watched a war in their backyards though the filtering lens of the American cable network CNN (Sreberny 2001). In 2003 the Arab world watched again as U.S. forces invaded Iraq, but this time they watched Al Jazeera, which had displaced the previously dominant BBC and CNN as the first-choice foreign news source in the region (Telhami and Zogby 2005).

Satellite channels, unlike their terrestrial counterparts, were perceived as communicating directly to the people without the government as intermediary, making them a formidable competitor for state news. Satellites bypassed the need to lay expensive cable or fiberoptics and other infrastructure to connect remote areas to the main communications system. The CEO of NileSat, for example, identified the need for an Arab satellite channel to carry terrestrial stations in order to transmit them throughout Egypt without having to build microwave transmitters throughout the desert (Bassiouni 2006). As satellites became less expensive to produce and launch, receiving technology simultaneously become cheaper and easier to make, even the poorest slums on the outskirts of Cairo boasted numerous satellite dishes on each building. Whereas in Saudi Arabia the government initially banned personal satellite dishes and then

permitted only with a license, Egypt took a more open approach. Satellite signals are prohibitively expensive to block and their footprint transgresses nation-state boundaries.

The impact of the distributional change caused by new ICTs on domestic media and politics in Egypt was seen in the greater competition Arab journalists faced from one another as well as their citizen counterparts. The change was also visible in the efforts by states to adapt their politics to a new logic of journalism that emphasized visibility, credibility, and immediacy over toeing the government line. When an angry contingent of opposition MPs marched through the streets of Cairo in July 2006 to the doors of the Arab League demanding a meeting with Amr Musa, they could hardly be ignored since dozens of television cameras captured their demands for him to do something about the Qana massacre. Secretary-General Musa ended up meeting with them and held a press conference afterwards. Later that week protests over the war engulfed downtown Cairo as hundreds of demonstrators alerted by blogs, text messages, and phone calls converged on Tahrir Square. News stations dispersed images of the protesting youth through the airwaves while photos and accounts of police brutality appeared online almost immediately. A week after the war in Lebanon started, Mubarak, who had initially refused to condemn Israel's military response to the kidnapping of its soldiers, made an about face and condemned the attack as unwarranted and extreme in the face of pressure from a public who could form their opinions using information from a wide variety of communication outlets.

The mainstream media in Egypt were in flux during the period of study as increased competition from pan-Arab and global media and new technological developments put pressure on professional norms, journalistic practices and identity markers as the Egyptian journalistic field shifted and converged. Journalists were situated in state institutions and in those cases were civil servants, which influenced the news they produced. The post-millennial period saw new

independent newspapers open and satellite television stations proliferate even as citizen-generated content began to find its way into the mainstream media. The journalistic field came under pressure from a new logic of confrontation with the government and more robust coverage of local, politically inconvenient news. Legal and regulatory matters became a focus of contestation, as did the extra-legal red lines that designated topics that were outside the acceptable discursive spaces created by the media. State-owned media were more restricted by these red lines, which meant their coverage was not on par with the more aggressive and less conciliatory coverage of their satellite counterparts, much less citizen journalists, who fundamentally challenged the essentialist notion of citizenship and public space promulgated by the mainstream media. Yet all had to contend with the legal environment in which they were embedded.

Competing Paradigms

In the neoliberal paradigm, economic goals take precedence over political or social ones. The Lockean conception of the public views the purpose of government to protect private property and the rights of citizens and the purpose of law to preserve it, thus enlarging the amount of freedom available (Locke 1952). In this sense, then, the concern of law and regulation is with individuals rather than society, as in national-cultural paradigms, since rights belong to individuals not society. The national-cultural model that emerged from Herder's theory of the collective (*volk*) conceives of a public sphere's principal function as that of preserving national culture, strengthening the collective based on an essentialist cultural identity and was thus diametrically opposed to the liberal model (Venturelli 1998). The rights granted by the liberal

model accrue primarily to the owners of capital since they are the ones who can purchase licenses, build ICT infrastructure, and create business to benefit from economic competition. But as Melody points out, although liberalization and competition through privatization may be the new paradigmatic model for telecom reform, most countries start from monopolistic conditions, meaning that entrenched interests and institutional structures must be reworked or dissolved in order to be successful (Melody 1997).

The Egyptian government took a maximalist view of the state as guardian of the people and had therefore historically monopolized the information and communications systems. Mubarak wanted to retain control of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) in order to maintain some level of control of content on the airwaves and public opinion. But I would argue that his reticence to reform the ERTU also grew not only out of his desire to control the media but also from a sense of cultural nationalism. A former minister of information underscored this sentiment when he called the union the "spirit of the Egyptian people" (El Amrani 2005). The minister was adamant that ERTU was not for sale because it belonged to the Egyptian people as a whole.

It takes time for politics to adjust to a new perspective on the public sphere, and developments in information and communication technologies meant that regulation of the media system lagged behind on-the-ground changes that were happening amid the proliferation of satellite television and Internet connectivity. But the changes in technological and regulatory structures during the period of study reflect the "dominant orthodoxy" of privatization and aversion to regulation favored by the distributional and epistemological orthodoxy of neoliberal globalization (Sakr 2001a; Singerman 2010). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) 'encouraged' Egypt to persist with privatization and boost private investment. In an attempt to

link national development to global forces through ICTs, he created the Ministry of Information and Communications Technologies and a national plan to create organizational linkages (El Sayed and Westrup 2003, 2). The issue of privatization also became an important Information Society policy issue as Egypt sought to adhere to its international commitments to privatize its telecommunications sector. Telecom privatization, however, posed a quandary for Mubarak. On the one hand, Egypt acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 and in doing so, agreed to adhere to its agenda of liberalization and privatization, including in the telecommunications sector. On the other hand, he wanted to maintain control of information flow and the media. The IMF managed to convince the government to privatize some of Egypt Telecom along with other strategic state-owned enterprises, a key tenet of the neoliberal ideologies of the WTO and IMF to which Mubarak had committed (Laframboise 2006; Zubaida 2002). Thus on December 31, 2005, Egypt officially ended the state monopoly of Telecom Egypt, and opened its mobile sector to competition. The first privately owned radio stations started broadcasting in 2003, which some experts suggested represented a significant shift in government policy regarding control of electronic media (Hamdy 2002).

Full privatization of Telecom Egypt was completed in 2006, adding $4 billion to Egypt's budget and enabling the entry of a new provider that became the third company competing in the mobile telephony realm (El-Sineity 2006). As these firms competed to bring mobile phones to the 80 percent of Egyptians without them, prices dropped and more people began using cell phones to communicate, integrating them into cultural practices and using them as the central tools of political protest. By 2007 the Middle East was the second largest mobile market in the world and most mobile phones used in the region had the ability to capture video by the latter part of the decade (Blain 2007). And by the start of the 2011 uprising, more than 71 million

Egyptians had mobile phone subscriptions, representing a penetration rate of nearly 91 percent (*Ict indicators in brief* 2011).

Investing in ICT Development

Mubarak's government made development of the information and communication technology sector a priority for socioeconomic development. The Egyptian government viewed ICT expansion as a means of national development as well as a way to catch up with industrialized countries and reduce global inequality (Mubarak 2000b). It was a way to seek external certification from the international community as regional leader and a modern, developing country hospitable to foreign investment and attractive to the ICT outsourcing sector. Mubarak wanted Egypt to become an outsourcing IT hub to attract foreign investment and create jobs in a country perennially plagued by unemployment rates of between nine and 12 percent throughout the decade (*UN statistical annex* 2010). Thus ICT development was also a way for this authoritarian leader to seek certification from his citizenry by creating jobs and modernizing their communication industry. Thus in 2002, the government began the Free Internet Initiative to allow computers to be purchased on installment plans with Internet connections priced at the cost of a phone call, leading to the quadrupling of users in three years (Eid 2004; Zarwan 2005, 19).

Mubarak reduced taxes on computers, set up technology centers and cyber-clubs throughout Egypt, and introduced "the smart village" and cyber-clubs projects that aimed to expand access and make people more comfortable using computers and the Internet, certainly a step in the direction of socioeconomic development but one that carried substantial risks for a government seeking to control access to and production of information (Mubarak 2000a). In

2003, the year Google launched the popular and easy-to-use Blogger platform, Egypt had three million Internet users and nearly double that number of mobile phone subscribers, but only about 30 blogs according to estimates by several early bloggers (World Development Indicators 2006).[25] Blogs entered the consciousness of these early adopters randomly through technological or mediated amplification, such as Google searches, or through the mainstream media attention granted to the Iraqi blogs in 2003. For example, one blogger wrote that the "first time I heard about blogging was when I installed Google Bar in my browser, and saw the Blogspot icon there. I guess Rami Sidhom (Ikhnaton2)[26] was introduced to blogging the same way."[27]

In 2004, ADSL launched, with high-speed connections at home available for $50 (Wheeler 2004). With home connections surging and about 400 Internet cafes in Cairo alone, Egyptian Internet users were spending an average of 12 hours per week online at that point (El-Sineity 2006; Wheeler 2004). The NTRA spearheaded efforts to reduce ADSL prices to expand Internet use throughout the country, reducing prices by 40 percent over the next two years as it sought to make connectivity more affordable and to reach a large portion of its population (El-Sineity 2006). By 2005 the number of Internet users had jumped to nine million and mobile subscribers to more than 13 million, giving Egypt the highest rate of Internet access among non-oil Arab states in the first half of the new millennium (Eid 2004; World Development Indicators 2008).

Internet access continued to increase at a rate of about three million people throughout the post-millennial period as prices for connectivity plummeted (World Development Indicators

[25] Exact numbers are notoriously difficult to specify, but most bloggers interviewed gave the figure 20-30 at the outset and perhaps 100 by 2004. See Chapter Two for my definition of what constitutes an Egyptian blog

[26] http://www.ikhnaton2.com/whisper/

[27] http://notgr33ndata.blogspot.com/2008/02/three-years-blogging.html

2011). In 2008, for example, Internet connection prices had dropped to between $10 to $22 depending on the speed, resulting in more than 427,100 DSL subscribers and the proliferation of Internet cafes that could support multimedia uploads and downloads (Reporters Sans Frontières 2009, 11).[28] As one early blogger from Heliopolis explained, "if it [the Internet] is available for as low as 45 LE a month anyone can definitely afford it, especially if they share" (Gharbeia 2008a). It is important to note, however, that connectivity numbers are inherently difficult to obtain because of the lack of data collection and the characteristics of Internet use in Egypt (Wheeler 2004). Such figures also tend to discount the impact of public places like Internet cafes, libraries, and schools that offer access (Khamis 2010; Wheeler 2004).[29] These (primarily young) Egyptians were not just playing video games, they were making friends, exchanging information, and blogging in a space where, as one user put it, "[o]ne can express ones thoughts and opinions freely" (Wheeler 2004). In fact, by early 2007, the Egyptian Blog Ring counted at least 1400 Egyptian blogs, with more than 900 awaiting moderation (Al Malky 2007). Despite the threat to Mubarak's control of information space posed by the rise of cyberactivism and the oppositional politics of the blogosphere, the expansion of Internet access was economic boon. By 2010 the ICT industry was bringing in $1 billion a year and the Information Technology Minister announced a $15 million investment "to bolster local IT businesses and intellectual property protection" he hoped could boost outsourcing revenues to $10 billion by 2020 (Egypt unrest threatens status as rising outsourcing star 2011). The government-funded growth of computer ownership and Internet connectivity created an opportunity structure for youth, who made up

[28] Prices are based on my discussions with bloggers, web publishers and Internet subscribers.

[29] Such figures also elide the difference between access, which measures an individual's capacity to go online and ability to use Internet, and use, which measures behavior (Klotz 2004)

more than a third of the population and were early adopters of new ICTs, and in particular cyberactivists.

Path Dependency

There was a tension between Mubarak's emphasis on developing ICTs and assimilating them into the economy and his desire to maintain control over the media sphere and information flows. He seemed to realize that he could only achieve the former goal by certifying his country as adhering to the ideals of the liberal paradigm since competitiveness on the world market and attractiveness to foreign investors meant being online and integrated into the world of Internet business, finance, and trade. Thus the ICT infrastructure was not filtered through a central access point and no central censorial regime was put in place, as it was in Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. Rather, private ISPs compete to provide service, so that by 1999, only six years after Egypt first connected to the Internet, there were 45 public and private ISPs (Zarwan 2005, 19). This number had risen to more than 200 private ISPs by 2008, although Telecom Egypt's TEData remained the country's largest ISP, with about 70% market share (Reporters Sans Frontières 2009; Radsch 2011a). Telecom providers were not held legally responsible for the content disseminated through their infrastructure, which allowed ISPs to flourish despite crackdowns on bloggers and Internet content deemed offensive to the state or Islam (Eid 2004).

Because of initial choices about Internet infrastructure, Egypt was unable to retroactively control the information environment in the manner of Saudi Arabia or China since it would be politically and technologically difficult to implement and detract from Egypt's desired image abroad. Nonetheless, in January 2011, Egypt proved that it actually had the means to shut down access to the Internet and mobile phone services by pressuring private companies and incurring exceptional economic costs. This "nuclear option" however, was not one that could be used

lightly, and thus during the period of this study, the Mubarak regime had to rely on other means at to discipline the new spaces created by Internet expansion. Throughout the decade, the government periodically cracked down on Internet café owners and blocked access to certain sites, shut down offending sites, monitored personal emails, often using extralegal means or the police to observe, arrest and prosecute Internet users. Thus even as the government pursued broader access, it restricted the freedom of Internet users and providers. Mubarak attempted to reassert state authority over the digital public sphere by expanding the gaze of the state to cyberspace and extending the disciplinary mechanisms at his disposal to the Internet.

A robust security apparatus and information service allowed the Egyptian government to surveil and discipline public space as it attempted to maintain its control over physical and virtual space. The Ministry of Interior's Vice Squad started using the Internet in 2001 to entrap homosexual men, and by 2003 they were arresting suspects at a rate of one arrest per week through Internet entrapment (Human Rights Watch 2004). In 2003, a new unit under the Department of Information and Documentation was created that became known as the Internet police (Eid 2004, 57). Internet café owners were required to obtain licenses and photocopy patron identity cards, and even before blogs became popularized, journalists and citizens were arrested and fined for publishing information online, or even just sending emails (Anonymous 2011; Eid 2004). An administrative court ruling in 2006 permitted authorities to block, suspend or shut down websites that could pose a "national security" threat, leading Reporters Sans Frontières to report that Mubarak "displays an extremely disturbing authoritarianism as regards the Internet" (OpenNet Initiative 2007; Deibert, Palfrey, and Rohozinski 2008a; Reporters Sans Frontières 2005/2006). The state security services intercepted online and digital communication in Egypt, monitoring phone calls, intercepting email and recording Skype conversations. It also

harassed cyberactivists at the airport, prevented them from traveling and confiscated their equipment, not to mention the arrests and torture of digital dissidents. Yet as people increasingly get information from online sources and become accustomed to using new Internet and communication technologies their expectations for more information, greater transparency, and free expression also increased, putting their expectations into conflict with what the law ostensibly allows. Authoritarian governments, like Egypt, that torture, abuse, and harass journalists and bloggers who crossed red lines or contravened the panoply of laws governing rights of expression and communication, found that such incidents became key episodes of contention and helped inspire activism and spur the movement.

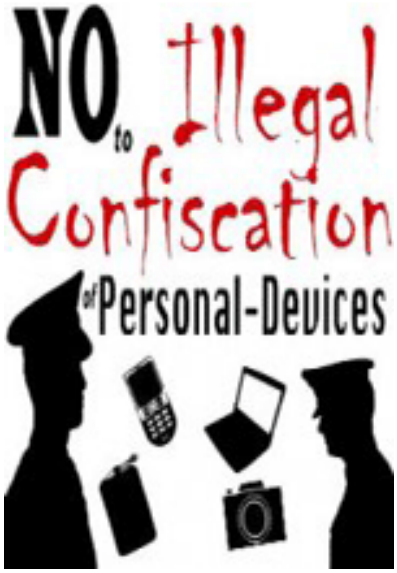

Figure 2 Anti-confiscation banner posted on many Egyptian blogs.

The Legal Environment

Laws provide the blueprints for the architecture of the public sphere, permitting and constraining particular activities and defining the realm of acceptable communication. They also make visible norms and threaten penalties if violated. Yet such norms and boundaries are contested, and in Egypt cyberactivism turned them into sites of political confrontation (Lessig 1999; Moe 2005). Governments use the architecture of legal "code" to reach particular substantive ends and create structures that control what can and cannot be done, or in the terminology of social movement literature, opportunity structures (Lessig 1999) Much of what is contained in these legal codes, however, is also about the nature of social responsibility as an Egyptian citizen and normative claims about the role of the press in society and its responsibility to the state. Laws must also be interpreted, however, and so the role of judges both in applying the law as well as setting precedents through administrative rulings underscores the importance of the 2005 demonstrations for judicial independence. Judicial independence meant that the Mubarak regime did not have complete control over how the laws were applied or interpreted, making the legal system an imperfect tool of control. As Baheyya explained in a July 2006 blog post, Egypt's presidents have used the law as a tool of repression and thus the legal field has become a site of contestation:

> Egypt's rulers have always understood that violent repression alone is never enough to control a complex society of guilds. So they have found in rule by law an utterly indispensable tool to certify and smooth the project of social control. Gamal Abdel Nasser understood this, and so does Sadat's less colourful though no less devious successor.
>
> From day one of his tenure, Mubarak invoked the handy legal tools bequeathed to him by his predecessors. But given how systematically and uninterruptedly he has been pilloried for the past three years, it was only a matter of time before his regime resorted to obscure

> legal provisions that had long fallen into disuse. And so the improbable subject of law has permeated nearly every political struggle of the past few years.[30]

The architecture of information space in Egypt lacked a unifying law under Mubarak and was instead a patchwork of constitutional, criminal, civil, administrative and international laws each of which conceptualized the rights of freedom, expression and communications slightly differently, often trapping people in a maze of legislation that had the effect of restraining free speech (al-Ghazi 1989). Initially there were no specific laws governing the Internet, meaning that a series of content, publication and criminal laws were invoked to regulate Internet content and publishers, as well as the mainstream media they were originally designed to cover. With the explosion of new ICTs, it took some time to figure out how the existing legal framework governed rights of expression, assembly and the press online. It was not initially clear where bloggers and online writers fell within the plethora of laws governing publication and broadcast. Bloggers' identity as citizen journalists caught them in a web of media laws and penal code provisions, and in the following section I examine the laws and regulations that were most consequential to cyberactivists as well as the mainstream media and professional journalists. Key episodes of contestation targeted Egypt's legal architecture, as I have will discuss in additional detail in the following chapters. The laws discussed below shaped how the state conditioned communication and freedom of expression and maintained hegemony over the journalistic field.

The regulatory and legal environment in Egypt was structured so as to maintain the political status quo while permitting greater investment and service provision through liberalization. Thus the country's constitutions had granted rights of free expression while invoking the need to maintain national security and cultural integrity. These principles were

[30] http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2006/07/egyptian-laws-and-other-afflictions.html

codified in the press, telecommunications, and audiovisual laws, although there was a tension with the concurrent need to adopt liberalization and privatization strategies and attract foreign investment (Hafez 2001b; Sakr 2001a, 2001b}. An analysis of the laws available to be invoked to regulate content or publication reveals the desire of the government to maintain control over public space and speech, and thus ultimately over the construction of Egyptian identity, while a more in depth analysis of specific legislation follows to illustrate the tenuous nature of this control given the state's socioeconomic goals, its constitutive technological infrastructural choices and the concerted efforts by activists to use them as focal points in processes of contestation.

Laws such as the Emergency Law, the 2005 constitutional amendment to permit direct presidential elections, and Article 48 of the Political Rights Law[31] became focal points of protest and activism. The Emergency Law, No. 62 of 1958, was first invoked in 1967 and was in effect without interruption since 1981 and renewed again in 2006 and 2010. It permitted 45-day detentions without charge and this provision was often used to detain bloggers and others accused of defamation, blasphemy or other expressive crimes. It also permitted the use of military courts for civilians with no right of appeal, a provision that became a major issue for cyberactivists in 2008 during the military tribunals of Muslim Brotherhood leaders discussed previously.

The use of these laws to crack down on freedom of expression highlighted the disconnect between official rhetoric of freedom and democracy and an empirical reality in which the

[31] "The Article stipulates a prison term of six months to three years and a fine of £E1,000-5,000 for anyone who publishes "false news or claims about elections or the behaviour and morals of any candidate with the intent to influence the election outcome." As veteran journalist Salah Eissa points out in his Saturday column in *al-Wafd*, however, Articles 302-306 of the Penal Code already clearly lay out penalties for libel and slander at a maximum of two years' imprisonment." Blog post by Baheyya.

president had been in power for more than two decades and the all-encompassing Emergency Law trumped constitutional guarantees. Nonetheless, the constitution, which lay out the state's normative conceptualization of citizenship as well as of press' role in the Egyptian state, remained an important reference point in the legal system as well as for cyberactivists.

Citizenship, Journalism and the Constitution

The constitution laid out the rights of the press but also spent significant time explaining its obligations and duties, how to perform them, and how media work related to the maintenance of the nation-state. These legal norms obligated the press "to exercise its vocation freely and independently in the service of society."[32] The qualification of serving society opened the way for prosecution of journalists, media outlets and ultimately bloggers, for not doing so, the determination of which lay with the national government and thus acted as a restraint on press freedom and freedom of expression more generally. Furthermore, bloggers were not considered part of "the press" as they used electronic platforms and were not allowed to become part of the Press Syndicate because they were not professional journalists. The lack of certification by the state of bloggers as professionals made it ambiguous as to whether these provisions even applied to them. However, Article 47 ostensibly guaranteed the freedom to both express *and* publicize opinion via any technological medium available on the grounds that "[s]elf criticism and constructive criticism shall guarantee the safety of the national structure." Article 48 prohibited censorship, except under Emergency Law, which was in place during the entire period of study. At least 35 other articles specify penalties ranging from fines to prison time for journalists. Thus public communication was technically a right, but was justified by the notion that it edify the

[32] Article 207

government, and thus communicative action that did not do so was not given the right of publicity. Publicity, as Kant argued, provides the context for political and civil life without which there are no rights or justice (2003). The right to publicity and free expression became a key rallying point across the blogosphere, though the state used the Emergency Law to try to prevent protests, demonstration, strikes and other forms of collective action. The symbiotic relationship between blogs and global mainstream media enabled individuals without access to state media institutions to nonetheless gain publicity for their causes, and fuel the reform movement.

The Residue of Colonialism: What Egypt's Press Laws and Penal Code Reveal About the State's Approach to Freedom of Expression

Egypt was home to the first newspaper published in the Arab world, *Le Courier de l'Egypt*, and the state mouthpiece Al-Ahram is one of the oldest papers still in publication. In 1799 Napoleon issued Egypt's first publication law, a technique other conquering powers adopted (al-Ghazi 1989, 163). In 1857 the Ottoman Empire decreed the first media law for the Arab world, and ever since Cairo has been the center of the Arab media field (Islam 2003) and thus perhaps it is not surprising that Arab blogging emerged from Egypt. As al-Ghazi notes, since nearly all print and electronic media were state-owned until the 20th century, they form "an integral part of the government or one its bodies" and thus publication law as such applied only to private, foreign or non-periodical media (1989, 161).

For most of the history of radio and since the inception of television in Egypt in 1959, broadcasting had been the purview of the government (Boyd 1999; Rugh 2004). The distributional changes that made radio and television affordable and popular also made them

useful as tools of statecraft because of the relative ease of controlling the national communications system, both through censorship and the signal jamming. Satellite and the Internet changed this. The 21st century information environment was far more complicated and diverse than at anytime in Egypt's history, and an array of information legislation sought to restrict, restrain, and redefine communicative space and the rights to participate in it.

Several laws directly or indirectly address the rights and protections of public speech by journalists and others, weaving a complex tapestry of criminal, administrative and civil law that govern the public sphere and expressive rights. The Law on the Protection of National Unity and the Law on the Security of the Nation and the Citizen were used to imprison journalists who ostensibly contravened the interest of the nation or foment public debate, while the 1956 Law Governing Association imposed criminal rather than civil sanctions on offenders (Human Rights Watch 2007). The Law on Political Rights of the same year was revised in July 2005 to allow for the suspension of party activities (including publication) and imposed criminal penalties on journalists and editors who publish "false information" intended to affect election results (Reporters Sans Frontières 2007). Although several laws regulate the public space available for expression, the Press Authority law along with the Penal Code established the state's conception of the public sphere as an arena of limited public expression in the service of the state and the people. The Telecommunications Law of 2003 prescribed a range of penalties for misuse of telecommunications networks, leading to broad interpretations of Internet crimes that were used to harass and punish bloggers. In 2007, for example, a judge attempted to force the closure of more than 50 websites including those of Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, and Amr Gharbeia's blog, although the administrative court threw out the case.

Blogs did not fit neatly into existing legal categories since the medium of dissemination largely determined which laws could be invoked. The fact that bloggers were not certified or accredited as professional journalists meant that the medium of publication and distribution was often the distinguishing factor in determining whether a blogger was subject to laws governing the press. Therefore, printing out a hardcopy of a blog post could subject the author to a panoply of laws that initially had little bearing on electronic media. As activist blogger Nawara Negm explained in an interview: "If you a hard copy of your blog and distribute it you are going to be in jail. We are governed by martial law, ok?!".

In addition to the constitutional provisions dealing with the press, the 1980 Law No. 148 established the Higher Press Council and laid out the rights and, more extensively, the duties of the journalist. Although it formally defined the media as the Fourth Estate, it reflected the same cultural essentialism as the constitution.[33] Realizing that the media play a key role in the formation and expression of public opinion, the government's concern in this law was to detail the requirements that journalists obtain in such a pivotal position, especially those who write the news. News is an "imposition of a definition of the world" that is constructed through interactions between social agents located in various fields, and as the journalistic field develops greater autonomy from the state, the government becomes increasingly dependent on the journalistic field to present its vision of the world to the public (Bourdieu 2005, 47). Thus control over media content, a primary shaper of national identity and consciousness, was exerted through regulation and legal means, as well as extra-legal means. Under this law, for example, the penalty for not publishing a legitimate correction included a minimum of three months in jail or a

[33] It is arguable as to whether a second and third estate even exist given the centralization of power and authority in the executive branch. This, however, is another argument that space does not permit me to address here.

significant fine.[34] Thus journalists had the responsibility to perform professionally by publishing corrections and maintaining personal privacy and source secrecy, but were obligated to protect national unity and cultural identity. These responsibilities shaped the dynamics of the journalistic field in a way that was at odds with the individualism of the blogosphere and the social justice activism of citizen journalism.

The overriding imperative for the press was "to respect the basic values of the community" as laid out in the Constitution.[35] Thus cultural order and cohesion, respect for Islam and the essential Egyptian identity as characterized in the Constitution, were essential responsibilities of the press and constituted professional norms that had the backing of law. It also defined the limits of acceptable speech in the public sphere, meaning the public sphere was in fact in the domain of the state and thus access to and the right to participate in the public sphere was granted and revoked by the government. The press law detailed many types of information that could not be published, including that which "disagrees with public morals" and modern interpretations of the Quran or of Islam without the approval of Al Azhar.

Censorship

The government took precautions to prevent deviation from its desired limits through pre- and post-publication censorship. For example, when the Cairo-based English monthly *Egypt Today* crossed a red line it appealed to a presidential advisor to intervene to keep the magazine on the newsstand, and it lost its right to send the magazine galleys instead of an actual copy for approval prior to distribution (Fitzpatrick 2006). Censorship applied to all traditional media content in Egypt, including foreign publications, although there tended to be greater leniency in

[34] See specifications in Articles 9 and 10; the punishment and penalties are described in Articles 11 and 12

[35] Article 6

English or French-language publications that would not be permitted in Arabic-language ones. The Egyptian Publishing Law contains a loophole that allows publication known as "Cypriot" newspapers to be published in Cypress for distribution in Egypt. They were subject to censorship prior to distribution, however, which included physically cutting out offending articles before delivering to distribution points or simply preventing distribution entirely (Youssif 2006}. In 2006, for example, authorities censored French and German papers that carried comments made by the Pope that were felt to defame Islam (Campagna, Karakashian, and Labidi 2006). In another incident the Cyprus-based *Middle East Times* submitted its copy to the censors and the editors decided to note in each article exactly where the content had been censored, subversively making visible the intrusion of the state; in 2003 the paper decided to migrate online rather than submit to the censors (Censored articles from the *Middle East Times* in Egypt).

But it was not feasible for the Egyptian state to pre-censor online media, as it had not set up the ICT infrastructure to facilitate screening nor did it have the manpower or technological aptitude to proactively screen blog posts, Tweets or other online content. Furthermore, the legal architecture did not address these platforms for the first several years of their existence. Blogs and other online content existed in a nebulous legal position because they did not fit nicely into the framework of existing laws, and at the beginning at least, had very limited reach among the Egyptian population.

Although the typical rhetoric of freedom and accountability was woven through the press laws, the penal code and criminal punishments for journalists abrogated these supposed guarantees and were often targeted by Egyptian journalists and international human rights organizations who found the threshold for free expression unacceptable. Penal codes "are widely used as a weapon by those in power to come back at anyone who criticizes them," and Egypt was

no different (Media freedom and dialogue between cultures). For example, religious insult and blasphemy were criminal offenses under Article 98(f), and were used to ensnare bloggers, who in some cases faced dual charges of insulting the president and Islam, as in the case of Kareem Amer, the blogger who was arrested for blasphemy and insulting Mubarak. A range of laws could be used against bloggers, although there was legal ambiguity about which laws applied to their publishing platforms, and the following examples illustrates how these could be stacked up against a defendant.

The Victim Becomes the Defendant

An example of the way these sections of the penal code were used as a weapon against bloggers occurred in February 2007 after blogger Amr Gharbeia stumbled upon Judge Abdel Fatah Murad's blog.[36] Gharbeia discovered that Murad was writing a book about blogs, which the judge asked him to review (Gharbeia 2008b). It turned out that several sections of the book, *Scientific and Legal Principles of Blogs*, were lifted from pieces Gharbeia and other bloggers had written, including a report by ANHRI.[37] As would be expected, Gharbeia blogged about the plagiarism in his review of Murad's book, performing isnad by linking to the blogs where the original work had appeared.[38] The blog post elicited several comments, which led to an accusation by the judge that the comments were libelous and the comment box itself was a form of incitement. Shortly thereafter a prosecutor tried to force Gharbeia to turn over the IP addresses

[36] http://www.drmourad.net/

[37] The report is available at http://www.openarab.net/reports/net2006/

[38] http://gharbeia.net/JudgeCopiesBlog and http://gharbeia.net/JudgeBookReview

of those who made comments but he refused; he had to agree to implement a filter instead (Gharbeia 2008b).[39] ANHRI issued a statement, along with nine other organizations, calling for Murad to clarify his use of sources.[40] Murad sued and in April 2010 the two NGO directors and the blogger were indicted on defamation charges under Articles 303, 306, 307 of the Penal Code, blackmail under Article 327 and "abuse of the Internet" under article 76 of the Telecommunications Law, crimes that carried hefty prison sentences and fines. He was unsuccessful.

Protest Against Amendments to the Press Law

When it came to the topic of free expression and opposition to censorship, there was a significant degree of asabiyah between journalists and bloggers, and by rallying together they could ensure their mutual goals of amplification and certification. In 2004 Mubarak promised to revise provisions that imposed criminal penalties for various media offenses, but when the time came to amend the code in 2006 he fell far short of his promise. The revised law decriminalized defamation of civil servants but doubled fines, while 35 other media offenses maintained the possibility of prison sentences (Campagna, Karakashian, and Labidi 2006; Reporters Sans Frontières 2007). Article 308, which mandated six-month minimum sentences for journalists who attacked the dignity or honor of an individual or the reputation of a family, remained on the books. So did Articles 179 and 102, which allowed, respectively, for the detention of those who insult the president or diffuse news or statistics liable to disturb or damage the public interest. On June 26, 2006, for example, veteran journalist and editor of *Al-Dostour* newspaper Ibrahim Eissa was sentenced to jail for insulting Mubarak in an article accompanied by a cartoon that portrayed

[39] http://bloggerforfreedom.wordpress.com/arrested-bloggers/amr-gharbeia/

[40] http://www.anhri.net/press/2007/pr0211.shtml

the president as a "fat depressive man wearing a crown."[41] Article 181 which prohibited vilification of foreign heads of state also remained on the books but with a mandatory penalty of prison time or hefty fines (Human Rights Watch 2006b). Journalists and bloggers held a series of protests in the summer of 2006 to protest the proposed amendment and its ultimate adoption, seeking to de-certify Mubarak as a reformer and amplify their normative claims on the right to free expression. As the incident below describes in detail, these episodes of contention challenged the delicate balancing game Mubarak played between liberalizing reforms and maintaining control while providing opportunities for citizen journalists to build asabiyah with their professional counterparts and make claims on their position within the journalistic field.

Figure 3 A protest against the new Press Law outside parliament. The sign reads "Viva corruption. Down with freedom of the press." Photo by Courtney C. Radsch

On July 9, 2006, 26 newspapers ceased publishing their papers for a day and hundreds of journalists and bloggers gathered at the parliament to protest the new press law and its mandated imprisonment and fines for journalists who insult public officials in the media. They were outnumbered by the thousands of riot police clad in their black uniforms and blood red arm-

[41] http://www.arabist.net/blog/2006/6/26/journalist-sentenced-to-one-year-in-prison-for-insulting-mub.html

bands who lined the perimeter of the parliament building, reinforced by another line of *baltagiyya* (plainclothes thugs). By the time the protest was scheduled to start the police had already surrounded the protesters, creating a nearly impenetrable wall through which the journalists covering the protest attempted to get their cameras. The authorities were not as worried about protesters as they were about cameras transmitting such images throughout the world. According to an Al Jazeera reporter, the police did not understand the difference between those journalists protesting and those covering the protest and tried to force her to the protester area whereas she was attempting to cover the demonstration for the news channel.[42] I was present on the ground and Hossam el-Hamalawy, Sally Sami and Malek Mustafa were among the citizen journalists who participated, posting detailed descriptions of what they witnessed on their blogs.[43]

The army-green transport trucks with tiny mesh-windows through which the peering eyes of riot police could be seen were parked all along the streets as far as Tahrir Square and the Egyptian Museum. Packed in like sardines, the riot police burst out of the truck and ran to take their place around the small pack of journalists holding signs condemning corruption- in Arabic and English to communicate with both Western and Arabic media. But there was a framing struggle as protesters with various objectives negotiated whether the slogans should remain focused on the press law or on broader political issues. "Demonstrators kept on chanting against the government, new press law, calling for the release of Sharqawi and the rest of the detainees," Hamalawy wrote in his blog post about the protest, but avoided direct mention of Mubarak

[42] Her resulting article is available at http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/131EB222-DD15-45A3-ADAD-CA60961023BB.htm

[43] http://arabist.net/archives/2006/07/09/hundreds-march-against-new-press-law/#more-1362

because the syndicate leaders wanted to avoid direct confrontation. "The Press Syndicate Council suits, with the exception of Gamal Fahmy, tried hard to temp down the militant mood of the demonstrators, eager to sway the demonstrators from chanting about anything but the press law. Still, it was clear the activists wanted to generalize their struggle, and link it with others."[44] Indeed this protest exemplified a broader challenge about framing and ijma' that activists faced in taking their struggles to the streets and linking up with other groups, such as political parties or professional syndicates. Building consensus was not always possible, and in episodes where ijma' did not occur the mechanisms of amplification and certification were also less likely to be enacted, and the "success" of oppositional forces became less likely.

Although at this particular protest no journalists were assaulted, sexually abused or arrested as was common in street demonstrations at that time, this was likely because, as one reporter I spoke with put it, the protesters were all journalists and the regime would get nowhere using the same tactics they use against less connected and media-savvy "indigents." Thus their connectivity and access to certification and amplification networks made repression more costly, providing some small level of protection against even worse repression.

Bitter Lemons from the First "Arab Spring": U.S. Democracy Promotion in the Middle East

The role of external actors, especially the United States, is inextricably linked with the movements that emerged to challenge the system in Egypt because of the symbolic and economic power of the U.S. in Egypt in the post-millennial decade. Egypt and the United States had a special relationship that helped insulate Mubarak's regime even as the U.S. sought to

[44] http://www.arabist.net/blog/2006/7/9/hundreds-march-against-new-press-law.html#more-1362

support democratic advocates and institutions. As the only Arab state to have a peace treaty with Israel, Egypt was also the largest recipient of U.S. aid amounting to nearly $2 billion a year, $1.3 of which went to Egypt's military. The provision of direct assistance, along with diplomatic pressure and normative standards of democracy and human rights contributed to opening space opened for political activism mid-decade and provided support to Egypt's activists. But there were also limits to U.S. influence, particularly given Egypt's central role in "fighting terrorism" and ensuring stability with Israel.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C., U.S. President George W. Bush launched a war against the Muslim nation of Afghanistan that had served as the training ground for several of the al-Qaeda hijackers. The world's focus quickly narrowed in on the Middle East as Bush built a case for invading Iraq, which was not linked to the attacks, under what many suspected were false pretenses. Millions around the world protested the growing case for his unilateral invasion of an Arab nation, outside of a United Nations framework (Reynié 2009, 12). Opposition to the war grew and in December 2002 the Egyptian Popular Campaign to Confront U.S. Aggression held what would turn out to be the first annual Cairo Anti-War Conference, which drew anti-war activists from abroad, including former U.S Attorney General and prominent international activists Ramsey Clark, Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, as well as leading Egyptian activists and intellectuals (Howeidy 2005a).

Protests against the Iraq war in January and February 2003 laid the groundwork for a new era of activism as thousands took to the streets to protest the war in Iraq, linking it with Palestine and Egypt and opposition to U.S. policy in both. These culminated in a protest in central Cairo on the day of the invasion of Iraq that drew 20,000 to Tahrir Square – the symbolic heart of downtown that houses the *Mouagamma* (Parliament) and the Arab League headquarters and just

around the corner from the American embassy – numbers not seen since the 1972 student-led deomonstrations (Howeidy 2003). As one journalist described it, "for 10 hours, the capital's most famous and strategic square was occupied by people from all age groups and walks of life: activists; politicians; students; children; passers-by; families; housewives; professors; beggars; journalists; and downtown Cairo residents" (Howeidy 2003).

Mubarak quickly banned demonstrations the next day and arrested hundreds of demonstrators, including two members of parliament, Hamdeen Sabahi and Mohamed Farid Hassanein. Dozens of intellectuals issued a joint statement disagreeing with Mubarak's position on the war, which he blamed on deposed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The Iraq war protests became a key turning point in strategies of contestation between the public and the regime. As Tarrow notes, such spontaneous assemblies often indicate the formation of a social movement is underway (Tarrow 1997, 1998), and indeed an early manifestation could be seen in the 20 March Popular Campaign for Change, which was devoted to the "struggle against despotism and dictatorship" according to its slogan, that grew out of the Iraq protests. It also adopted "No to extension, no to hereditary succession" as its other slogan, putting into head-on contention with Mubarak and the regime. Egyptians, and Arabs generally were vehemently opposed to the war and believed the United States was invading Iraq to control its oil not to find nuclear weapons as Bush initially said nor to promote democracy as he later claimed. Many saw it as another sign of U.S. imperialism in the world, on top of its already detested support of Israel.

The public's opposition became even more inflamed on the third anniversary of the Palestinian Intifada, which enjoyed huge support in Egypt, as Palestinian supporters took to the streets on September 27 and 28, 2003 in what quickly turned into anti-government protests (Howeidy 2003). Activists focused their protests not only on the U.S. but also Mubarak's regime,

whose foreign policy they disagreed with and whose economic policies meant that millions of Egyptians lived in poverty. His popularity did not increase when he floated the Egyptian pound in January 2003 and it lost half its value. The overwhelming support of Egyptians for the Palestinian cause and their opposition to Mubarak's accomadationist stance toward Israel and the U.S. had been the main focus of protest by the youth and continued to remain a significant zone of contestation as cyberactivism and the blogosphere developed. The perennial issue of justice in Palestine provided one of the few outlets for public articulations of protest and often seemed to represent displaced activism on the domestic front. It was also the issue on which many activists cut their teeth.

For decades Egyptians had been skeptical of American motives in the region and disgusted with its policy towards Israel and the Palestinians, and Iraq simply confirmed their beliefs. "The United States, it is particularly thought, wants to take control of the Middle East and its natural resources. For most Egyptians, the war in Iraq provides proof of this" (Onians 2004, 84). Nonetheless, Bush adopted an aggressive democracy promotion agenda and from 2004 to 2005 there was pressure on the Mubarak government to open space for civil society and political activists to operate.

Concerns that U.S. and Western support for human rights and democracy activists risks discrediting indigenous efforts because of the history of hypocrisy and support for dictatorships in the region have plagued democracy promotion efforts, and even given the term a negative connotation. One study found that support for independent media outlets can be beneficial because there are fewer political overtones to media assistance, which can indirectly contribute to a similar agenda by creating space where the opposition can meet and facilitating

communication and interaction between regime and opposition, including on important issues such as free and fair elections (Zunes and Ibrahim 2009).

Nonetheless, the laudable if somewhat suspect goal of promoting democracy in the Middle East became a national security priority for the Bush administration, which adopted several policies ostensibly aimed at strengthening civil society and democratic processes (Sharp 2006). Bush spoke directly to Mubarak about the need for reform and top administration officials reiterated the message. The administration deployed officials and resources to the region, with Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice visiting Egypt several times to shore up support for Bush's democracy agenda (Weisman 2005). The State Department launched the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to provide support for "democracy promotion."

This included funding human rights groups, legal and electoral projects, development programs, election monitoring and educational initiatives like journalist training. In 2005, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) gave a controversial $1 million to six Egyptian NGOs to monitor the parliamentary elections (El-Din 2005). Such funding commitments did not go unnoticed by Egyptian bloggers, with one anonymous blogger calling USAID's new policy "aggressive" because it would provide aid directly to NGOs without the traditional vetting by the Egyptian government, and earmarked more than $1 million for women's political participation and the creation of a "formal network of democrats." Egypt received more funding than any other Arab country (with the exception of occupied Iraq), $100 million in 2006 alone.

The National Endowment for Democracy in particular funneled millions of dollars to civil society organizations in Egypt, with the Center for International Private Enterprise receiving three times as much funding as all its other grantees (Zunes and Ibrahim 2009). Aid

was funneled through the USAID to support media freedom programs, with over $3.7 million allocated in 2007 to train media professionals for "the restructured media sector" (Egypt Program USAID 2006). USAID had provided over $30 million for ICT development and training in Egypt by the time the first blog emerged there (El Sayed and Westrup 2003). The provision of this support directly aided the expansion of information and communication technologies predicated on open networks to which many policymakers and pundits attributed inherently democratizing powers.

Furthermore, several of the more prominent liberal bloggers received training, participated in exchanges and internships, and benefitted from the largess of U.S. funding for democracy promotion in the Middle East. The main vehicles were MEPI and USAID. Freedom House, Internews, IREX, and many other NGOs were all given millions of dollars in grants to conduct programs related to blogging, citizen journalism and activism. In 2006, for example, Freedom House won a $10 million grant to help build a "new generation" of activists through a series of exchanges and trainings in part designed to build a core network of skilled activists who could share their knowledge and brings more people into cyberspace through cyberactivism. The government-funded New Generation of Advocates program brought several Egyptian cyberactivists including citizen journalists Wael Abbas, Gemyhood, and Nora Younis and April 6 Facebook organizer Esraa Abdel Fattah, to Washington D.C. to meet with high-level officials, including the Secretary of State, and liaise with the International Solidarity Committee. Beginning in 2008, the Washington-based Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED) began convening dialogues with Arab youth and cyberactivists and facilitating exchanges and lobbying on Capitol Hill. And professional internships, the one Abbas and Gemyhood got at Slate.com in the spring of 2007, helped build their capacity as journalists and bloggers, while enabling them

to build powerful connections. The latter went on to become editor-in-chief of Al Destor online while Abbas continued to forge the way for independent citizen journalists. Others went on study strips to Serbia and South Africa to learn non-violent resistance tactics from youth leaders of uprisings in other parts of the world, such as Otpor.

Such capacity building was limited among the Brotherhood bloggers. Muslim Brotherhood bloggers did not benefit from this support or networking due to rules regarding support for terrorist organizations and the requirement that all participants in U.S.-funded programs be cleared through a terrorist database. In many cases they were barred from participating in any of the activities sponsored by groups who receive funding from the U.S. government, putting them at a disadvantage since being networked is a form of power.

Activists across the spectrum, including the Muslim Brotherhood, sought to capitalize on the United States' democracy promotion agenda in the post-September 11 Middle East, often adopting the rhetoric of democracy, freedom and representation to further their own agenda of achieving greater political participation and representation. The U.S. government's support for political reform was a key component of the political opportunity structure that existed mid-decade in Egypt. As Mohammed Hamza, a 27 year-old Muslim Brotherhood blogger who came to hold a young leadership position in the MB, explained, the United States' support for democracy and change in the region matters and is paid attention to by activists and the government. Although this can be somewhat painful to admit, as his quote below shows, he nonetheless recognized that the dynamics of the U.S.-Egyptian relationship enabled the perception that the US could affect the political opportunity structure in Egypt, resulting in a brief opening between 2004 and early 2006. This opening was not a given, but was both

rhetorically and materially created as people on the ground and officials constructed spaces for influence:

> At this time we have a view and we just use it that the involvement changed by the pressure of United States to make a real translation to democracy. And we said that, ok, there is a good chance to move. And we made real pressure, and the result is 88 members in the public consultation. But after that everything changed… U.S. policy has effects directly here in Egypt. Why? Because the government in Egypt takes support from the armed forces and the United States. So. When the U.S. talks about a "real democracy" everything will change. I would like to say that I didn't need the support of the U.S. No. I talk about the support of U.S .to government. (Hamza 2008)

Although Egypt was a focus of U.S. democracy promotion initiatives and received millions of dollars in funding for related activities, it was also a key ally in the "war on terror" and, as the only Arab state to have signed a peace treaty with Israel, was in a relatively strong bargaining position. Mubarak maintained his support for the Iraq as part of the U.S. "anti-terrorism" agenda despite nearly 80 percent of Egyptians who were polled in the beginning of 2006 believing the US should pull out of Iraq in the next few months and that the threat of terrorism had worsened (World public says iraq war has increased global terrorist threat 2006). Egypt traded its support for the U.S. anti-terrorism agenda in exchange for backing off of criticism of its human rights record. In 2005 Condoleeza Rice spoke out forcefully in support of human rights in Egypt whereas a year later the language had shifted focus to change from within and outright criticism was muted (World report: Egypt 2007). The 2006 imprisonment of democracy activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim was a case in point; unhappy with his human rights center and their damning publications the state arrested and imprisoned the activist until US aid was put in jeopardy, prompting his release (Ibrahim 2006). Some members of Congress had attempted to withhold some of it's $1.7 billion in annual aid to protest human rights abuses, but it failed amid the more pressing considerations of Egypt's tacit support for the American war in

Iraq and cooperation with Israel on the Palestinian issue. Egypt was an important ally in Bush's "war on terror," which allowed the state to adopt the rhetoric of terrorist threats to clamp down on opposition and subversive forms of expression and gives the state greater bargaining power.

The United States' rhetoric about supporting democracy lost its verve after the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections when the Islamist movement Hamas (an acronym for the Arabic words *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya*, or the Islamic Resistance Movement) won a decisive victory over its rival, the secular Fatah faction (Bradley 2008). Hezbollah, the Shiite Islamist movement in Lebanon, also won several seats in the Lebanese parliamentary elections in 2005, adding to the discomfort of the Bush administration's professed commitment to promoting democratic elections. These two electoral outcomes coupled with resentment against the U.S. war in Iraq and public support for the general aims of al-Qaeda served as a warning to an administration whose policy of supporting democracy in the Middle East had led to electoral victories for groups it considered terrorist organizations. Fears that the Muslim Brotherhood would win in a truly democratic Egypt shifted emphasis away from democracy promotion towards stability and support for U.S. policy in Iraq and the so-called "War on Terror." The U.S. lost interest in promoting democracy in places like Egypt where the MB was the main opposition group and many said would be the likely winner of any truly democratic election. As Onians so aptly put it: "The likelihood that U.S.- or European-sponsored democratic reform in the region will, paradoxically, lead to those most ideologically opposed to the West coming to power is not lost on Middle East regimes keep to stay in control" (Onians 2004, 83). As the U.S. softened its criticism of human rights violations and commitment to democracy, activists lost some of the American pressure that had helped support their efforts (Shadid 2007).

This policy change and its implications were not lost on bloggers and cyberactivists, who paid a price, as did Kefaya and the Muslim Brotherhood. As Malek Mustafa explained, U.S. second thoughts gave Mubarak leeway to do what he wanted in his country without concern about its democraticness:

> After what happened in Palestine, Hamas getting power… You know, here in Egypt, the regime follows the American regime. So if the U.S. says 'we want democracy,' the Egyptian regime lets us do what we want. But when they saw Hamas win, Islamophobia spread everywhere, and they think if we have democracy in Egypt it will be like Gaza, so the U.S. decided to let Mubarak do whatever he wants in Egypt because he is their strong guy in the Middle East. So they want Mubarak to stay so he can serve them [the U.S.]. If Mubarak goes, it will be like Hamas in Palestine. And they forget Egypt is not Hamas, not Gaza. (Mustafa 2008)

Egyptians overwhelmingly perceived U.S. pressure for democratic reforms including free and independent media as disingenuous and even hypocritical. A 2004 survey showed that 78 percent of Egyptians did not believe that the United State's real objective in Iraq and the Middle East was really the spread of democracy, opinions that remained unchanged in 2005 (Telhami and International 2004, 2005a). President Bush ranked as the most disliked leader outside Egypt by 36 percent of the population polled, far more than the second-most hated leader Ariel Sharon, who came in at six percent (Telhami and International 2007). A year later 93 percent of Egyptians held unfavorable views of the U.S. government and 92 percent thought the U.S. sought to "weaken and divide the Islamic world" (Kull 2007; Muslims believe US seeks to undermine islam 2007). Even the candidacy and election of Barack Obama as the first black American president gave Arabs and Egyptians little hope the United States would change its policy in the region or have a better chance of advancing peace (Telhami and International 2010).

President Obama largely avoided the rhetoric of democracy promotion in his first term and did not include democracy in the three D's that were to be the pillars of his administration's foreign policy: diplomacy, development and defense. Despite a speech he gave in Cairo early on in his presidency about the need for political reform, there was frustration in the democracy promotion community about his failure to speak out forcefully on human rights and make it a priority. Even as the 2011 uprising gathered momentum, Obama's measured response drew criticism from some and it was not until several days into the uprising that he withdrew his support from Mubarak.

Conclusion

What these vignettes reveal is the extreme preoccupation on the part of the state with who had the right to speak publicly and what could be said. The overriding imperative running throughout Egyptian law and the communications' regulatory apparatus was the need to control and contain information, so the legal architecture sought to define who is a journalist, the normative role of the press and the limitations on speech in the mass media. But technological shifts made such control increasingly futile.

Defining who was a journalist or what qualified as a news outlet became problematic with the rise of blogs, and as the means of information production and dissemination became cheaper and more widespread in the post-millennial period. The technological changes also highlighted the government's relative inability to control and govern the virtual public sphere through existing legal frameworks, which limited its options since offensive violence or repression was the alternative, but carried with it its own tradeoffs. The blogosphere was out of

the government's control because of the openness of Egypt's technological architecture and the inability of the government to control the means of distribution since the Internet had reduced the costs of dissemination so drastically.

In general, then, Egypt maintained a battery of legal regulations through which the state attempted to discipline the public sphere and the expressive potential of its citizens, even if many of its machinations were in conflict with contemporary norms of freedom and publicity. But although Egypt paid lip service to such norms in some of the rhetoric it enshrined in law, the underlying philosophy of the legal and regulatory apparatus was one of control and punishment. Such a philosophy, however, was deeply at odds with the values and underlying philosophy of the blogosphere, and carried with it significant costs as cyberactivists made visible the state practices that contravened the rhetorical norms.

States must adopt and adapt communication policies, regulatory models, and legal frameworks to keep pace with technological developments and shifts in the information and communication environment that will inevitably impact the conceptualization of the public sphere and normative obligations of citizenship. The imprints they leave on the media ecosystem creates a level of path dependency that constrains future choice sets, and require tradeoffs between seeking certification as a modern, progressive state and seeking to control and restrict free expression. Since authoritarian and patrimonial regimes depend on a mixture of coercion, patronage and consent to maintain their rule, states like Egypt use the media industry to manufacture consent. As analyzed above, this mixture emanates from the use of the legal system, regulatory choices, and attempts to control and coerce the journalistic field. Such a strategy, however, requires tradeoffs that Mubarak's simultaneous push for technological development and expansion of the Internet made increasingly visible. Furthermore, censorial regimes on the

Internet require significant investment and technological expertise, neither of which Egypt had. Since Egypt did not build its ICT infrastructure to filter all Internet content through a central incoming node or create a censorial body to filter Internet content as China did, blocking content was prohibitively expensive and technologically difficult so it had to rely on pressuring ISPs, many of which were privately-owned.[45] The same was true with the satellite television industry that grew up during this time period.

Yet an emphasis on privatization may not be as instrumental in upsetting the current system as many who promote it would seem to hope since they can help entrench dominant power relations and an element of state control through targeted policies that enable foreign private ownership over domestic private ownership (Sakr 2001b). And a policy that promotes competition does not in and of itself guarantee competitive options will exist, as regulators must ensure that when they adopt a liberal regulatory model that they proactively enable and encourage competition, which typically requires capital investment in the mainstream media industry (Melody 1997, 17). Otherwise the established monopolies will continue and competition will remain a rhetorical device rather than a regulatory one. Furthermore, privatization without commercialization is unlikely to lead to liberalization. Privatization had the effect of further entrenching the wealthy elite in the telecom sector while regulatory policies were structured to prevent them from expanding their power into the media sector. Sakr persuasively argued that domestic private capital was excluded through the expansion of privatization policies that favored a mix of private foreign ownership and government control of satellite channels and avoided adopting a particular stance on transnational media ownership (Sakr 2001). A functional

[45] During the period of study it was widely assumed that the government lacked the capacity to completely shut off the Internet since it had not done so during any contentious episodes through 2010. But in fact, on January 28, 2011 Egypt shut down the Internet and mobile phone networks for five days amid massive street protests that led to Mubarak's ouster, proving that in fact Egypt did have the capacity but had lacked the will to do so.

telecom sector built on a liberal regulatory model can scarcely sustain itself without the necessary market mechanisms to translate audience wants into services and programming (Fowler and Brenner 1982). But the advertising market for satellite stations was sclerotic and barely able to support the existing providers (Fakhreddine 2006; Hayek 2009), national advertising was dominated by the state and the tourism industry (Maidhof 2006), and Internet advertising was negligible (Radsch 2009a).

Hence the Internet provided a unique opportunity for individuals, those without economic capital or *wasta*, to impart and receive information and amplify their voices. Bloggers and cyberactivists took advantage of political opportunities like the partial reform of legal provisions and opportunities to access the system through new rules on association or electoral participation even as the state continued to use violence and repression against its citizens. This struggle between the state and society reflected the discrepancy in official policy and "betrayed a more profound and systemic tension between ... political pluralism and the statist and monopolistic essence of the regime" (Fish 1995, 40-41). It became clear throughout the decade that development goals, especially in the ICT sector, were often at odds with the imperatives of national security and the nationalist model upon which many information and communication laws were founded. While Mubarak had framed the Internet as a technology that promised to bring Egypt into the realm of advanced countries, it was also a scary technology for an authoritarian government because of the ease and speed with which information could be dispersed and people organized.

Indeed, the nationalist regulatory model of the Egyptian public sphere reveals how Egypt conceived of the public interest as based on the obligation to maintain order and national unity under the auspices of the state. It underscores the paternalistic relationship between the state and

its citizens, with the state defining the acceptable parameters of debate and meeting out punishment to those who deviate from them. Censorship, of course, is designed to limit deviation in the first place. But Egypt was not as effective, or perhaps committed, as other Arab states, like Saudi Arabia or Tunisia, in restricting Internet access and opportunities of contention and thus Egyptians were able to use blogs, Facebook pages and other social media relatively freely while collective action in the streets was permitted periodically.[46] This is not to say the state did not use repressive means and offensive violence to close of opportunities, but that it used those in conjunction with a level of tolerance that it also permitted the independent press to some extent. Like Solidarity writers who published during the era of martial law in Communist Poland or the Russian *samizdat* in the late 1980s, bloggers were allowed to publish in the blogosphere despite the Emergency Law. While a labyrinth of contradictory rights and prohibitions created potential minefields for cyberactivists, in general it was their offline activities in conjunction with their identities as cyberactivists that got them into trouble, as I discussed in the following chapters.

[46] This is not to say the state did not use repressive means and offensive violence to close of opportunities, but that it used those in conjunction with a level of tolerance that it also permitted the independent press to some extent.

CHAPTER IV

WE THE PEOPLE: CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN THE ERA OF SOCIAL MEDIA

"In a dictatorship, independent journalism by default becomes a form of activism, and the spread of information is essentially an act of agitation" – Hossam el-Hamalawy

"It's not enough simply to write. Blogging must go hand in hand with street action, otherwise it's just empty, useless protest" – Malek Mustafa

In this chapter I argue that Egypt's young citizen journalists radically shifted the media ecosystem and informational status quo through the development citizen journalism as a process of contestation in which they imbued political meaning to symbolic framing contests to define quotidian struggles against social injustice, human rights abuses and censorship as part of a broader movement for political reform. This chapter addresses all of the research questions, with specific emphasis on the specific on the fourth question: Does citizen journalism alter the dynamics of state-dominated media systems and if so, why? In authoritarian regimes citizen journalism, I argue, has become central to contemporary contentious politics and represents a potent form of political contestation. It creates spheres of dissidence where critiques of the dominant, mainstream media version of reality is articulated and alternative political and social orders proposed. It also contributes to the development of an agreed upon social reality and the development of fact, since as Goldfarb observed, "factual truth is the bedrock of a free politics" (Goldfarb 2006, 18).

Citizen journalism is as much a response to restricted venues for participation in the public sphere, as it is a way to present an alternative version of "the truth" propagated by the

mainstream media, which in Egypt was of course dominated by the state. Cyberactivism gave rise to citizen journalism as one of the most powerful and impactful ways to participate in the public sphere and explains how the ways in which the Internet and social media are implicated in political change. Indeed citizen journalism was the embodiment of a micropolitics of power in that it presented alternatives to metapolitical narratives and generated agency and autonomy in the communication flows typically implicated in the reification of the status quo. Citizen journalism was a mechanism for reasserting sovereignty over the public sphere and challenging the hegemony of the state via the media system. Although the Egyptian constitution rhetorically guaranteed rights like freedom of expression, as I discussed in Chapter Three, in reality few Egyptians believed they had those rights and therefore their agency was diminished. Citizens must believe in their rights and presume them psychosocially for them to actually have access to them, and this chapter argues that citizen journalism contributed to building this understanding in the broader public sphere (Abramson et al. 1978). It helped people understand their human rights, rights to freedom of expression, and due process, and created an avenue for participation in the mediated formal public sphere.

This chapter begins by presenting a definition of citizen journalism and an analytical framework for examining how social media technologies made possible an activist strategy of citizen journalism. It proceeds to analyze four specific episodes of contention and how citizen journalism activated specific series of mechanisms that enabled them to win framing contests, construct joint grievances, and gain access to power resources in the journalistic field and from transnational activist networks.

By explaining how and why the process of constructing a dominant political narrative or opening up new issues to discussion in the public sphere occurred, this chapter shows how

bloggers constructed joint grievances with the potential to mobilize youth and the public and how particular mechanisms combined to create processes that helped sow the seeds of revolution. But this was a process that was contested, particularly by mainstream professional journalists in the state-dominated media system, and thus these episodes formed part of a broader certification struggle that was shaped by the dynamics of the Egypt journalistic field. I therefore proceed in this chapter to explore the framing contest over who counted as a journalist and why it mattered, making the case that the subject position of journalist enabled access to certain resources and certification mechanisms. I conclude by analyzing the contest between MSM and citizen journalists and how the journalistic field reconfigured to accommodate citizen journalism, which in turn gave them access to power resources and the public sphere. The creation of the citizen journalist identity and subject position simultaneously in the journalistic field and the blogosphere enabled access to resources, power and forms of symbolic capital and had structural advantages as well as disadvantages, not least economic.

The emergence of networked, participatory new media technologies and the creative and strategic ways that activists used them, propelled citizen journalism to the center of contentious politics and made it an effective resistance strategy. This form of communication was made possible by the technological developments and social media platforms that emerged and became popular during the time of study, and thus those individuals and groups who were able to take advantage of them garnered particular benefits; newness was an important dynamic in this equation, since newness is on of the constitute properties of news. Newness was an opportunity structure for citizen journalism, as I discuss in greater detail throughout the subsequent chapters. Citizen journalists challenged the privilege role of professional journalists not only in the state

media but also in the journalistic field more broadly, and thus undermined the hegemony of the state in the logic of the journalistic field.

In Egypt, tens of thousands of journalists were also state-employees, and therefore part of the state apparatus. If indeed, as Bourdieu argued, the pressure of the journalistic field can modify power relationships within other fields in an "incomparably more significant" way than ever before, then the entry of new actors into this field is of particular interest (Bourdieu 1998, 68). Through the analysis of citizen journalism as strategy of contestation, this chapter analyzes how particular sequencing of mechanisms produced political impact, and makes the case for how social media technologies made this possible.

In order to generate political impact, citizen journalism had to trigger amplification and certification mechanisms. In addition to this somewhat utilitarian external impact, citizen journalism also led to feelings of individual empowerment and thus shifted the inner life worlds of activists. Citizen journalism was a crucial factor that helped change the mindset of Egyptians who felt hopeless, fearful, and impotent by erasing red lines, challenging the hegemony of media institutions and taking on the most significant political debates of the day. Conversations with citizen journalists and participation in their journalistic activities made this clear. Although it is difficult to measure feelings of empowerment, the self-expressed perception of efficacy in impacting mainstream media and of political impact works as a proxy.

Citizen Journalism: Definitional Distinction

As I have argued earlier in this dissertation, the power to name and classify is a source of power, I begin by proposing a definition of citizen journalism before proceeding to excavate the

power dynamics at play in the journalistic field in the certification of someone as a citizen journalist or as performing citizen journalism.

I define citizen journalism as an alternative and *activist* form of newsgathering and reporting that leverages networked social media and functions outside but in relation to mainstream media institutions, often as a response to shortcomings in the professional journalistic field, and which tends to be driven by different objectives and ideals and rely on alternative sources of legitimacy than mainstream journalism. Indeed citizen journalism is a practice that refers to non-professionals who engage in acts of journalism, such as reporting, fact-checking, documenting, verifying, quoting, etc. typically using ICTs such as mobile phones, the Internet and social media or blogging platforms to self-publish the resulting user-generated content. The literature of citizen, alternative and participatory journalism is most often situated in a democratic context and theorized as a response to corporate news media dominated by an economic logic (Atton 2003; Couldry and Curran 2003; Deuze 2002; Deuze 2005; Downing 2001; Jones 1997b; Platon and Deuze 2003). But in Egypt journalism was dominated by a political logic, and alternative forms of journalism arose in response to different stimuli.

Journalism is a particular form of communication that is "realist" as opposed to fictional and aspires to the ideals of the journalistic field, such as truthfulness, credibility, verifiability, and the public interest. The journalistic speech act thus aspires to particular qualities usually described as "professional" and which carry value within the journalistic field. Journalism is a set of informational and communication practices based on particular principles and rules that seek to establish authority in the production of what is considered reality (Bourdieu 2005; Lowrey 2006; Ryfe 2006). Journalism, the practice through which news is created, is a practice that helps create facts and describe the world. It is therefore also a symbolic struggle over the

perception of the world. Bourdieu argues that such struggles take objectivist and subjectivist forms; the former through displays of representation and the latter through attempts to change evaluative structures of construction, that is, the words and names that construct social reality. Unlike Schudson's definition of journalism as "the business or practice of producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of general public interest and importance," which obscures how the journalistic field is implicated in defining public interest and importance, my definition acknowledges the role this particular mode of communication plays in constructing meaning and potentiality (Schudson 2003, 11). Truthful representation, accuracy, verification and timeliness are among the regulative rules that distinguish journalism from other modes of communication. A journalist is therefore someone who is distinguished by their participation in these practices and the field they constitute, and journalism therefore an act by which that identity is invoked through certain practices and ontological commitments.

The journalistic field is created through the constitutive rules that define what counts as journalism and normative rules that define good journalism and who counts as a journalist. Or as Ryfe notes, "constitutive rules tell us what the news is, regulative rules tell us how the news ought to be produced," and it is the interplay between these rules that account for the similarities and differences in the production of news (Ryfe 2006). Constitutive rules, however, do not merely regulate, they create and define behavior and norms (Searle 1969, 33). They are rules that delineate the set of acceptable practices that define and shape a field, and thus can become sites of contestation when new entrants, like bloggers, attempt to position themselves within journalistic field. Although the question of who is a journalist has becoming increasingly debated amid the expansion of social media, a journalist has traditionally been thought of as a

professional who serves the public interest and act as a watchdog on the government and those in power. Moretzsohn defines journalists, as:

> [P]rofessionals who are authorized to have access to information and to places unavailable to the general public, and therefore should have the right to access sources from which they can gather relevant information for society at large. This is nothing more than the status given to journalists by the old concept of the 'fourth power' … (which) grants journalists social recognition and the role of mediator. (2006, 34)

Yet in a country like Egypt, where the media is heavily influenced and manipulated by the political field, the journalist is often not trusted to play that mediator role. Citizen journalists were able to take advantage of the opportunity such lack of trust created.

A 'journalist' is also a privileged category of person, one that endows its recipient with certain authority, rights, and capital. Indeed there are material consequences in such certification. For example, journalists are typically remunerated and receive a byline for their work, through which they obtain economic and social capital. In Egypt, journalists can be members of the Press Syndicate and reap the ensuing financial benefits of membership. There are organizations that represent and advocate on behalf of journalists, such as the international rights groups the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), and provide emergency assistance funds and pro-bono expert legal representation. The UN Human Rights Council, through the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and UNESCO both have a mandate related to journalists, and in particular help raise awareness about violence or restrictions against them.

Journalists are also subject to specific laws and regulations reserved for the media in Egypt, such as registration requirements and legal guarantees of source protection, as I discussed in Chapter Three (Banisar 2007). Journalists also have access to symbolic capital and other power resources, namely the power to shape public perceptions and mobilize public opinion.

Professional and citizen journalists, however, occupy different positions of power: the professionals are situated in the mainstream media, and are paid for practicing their profession and thus typically possessed greater economic capital than bloggers. Bloggers were initially situated in the field of the blogosphere and not the journalistic field, although as I discuss throughout this chapter, that changed over time, but not without contestation as professionals sought to maintain their exclusive access to the power resources of the journalistic field.

By juxtaposing the term "citizen," with its attendant qualities of civic mindedness and social responsibility, with that of "journalism," which refers to a particular profession and form of communication as outlined above, I seek to underscore the link between the practice of journalism and its relation to the political field and public sphere. The term citizen journalist deliberately situates the subject in a field in which civic identity and one's relationship to the state are implicitly implicated in the practice of journalism and its ontological commitments. This is distinct from amateur journalism, for example, which situates the agent in the journalistic field and implicates them in the reification of that field and its attendant rules and practical logic. The term 'alternative journalism', on the other hand, is counter-hegemonic and situates the alternative journalist in juxtaposition to the mainstream or corporate media, its values and its ideology. As Atton notes, alternative media present a "radical challenge to the professionalized and institutionalized practices of the mainstream media" (Atton 2003, 267). Citizen journalism, like participatory journalism, is an "act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information, in order to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information" (Bowman and Willis 2003, 9). Citizen journalism, however, is not necessarily amateur or alternative,

particularly as mainstream media increasingly integrates (one could also say co-opts) it in its newsgathering, reporting and dissemination practices.

In her conceptualization of citizen media in the democratization of communication, Rodríguez concentrates her analysis on how the appropriation of ICTs by local communities generates processes of social and cultural change and citizenship building (Rodríguez 2001). She proposes that daily political action and engagement construct citizenship, rather than it being a status given by the state, functioning as a form of political identity. Hence citizen media are those that trigger and maintain processes of citizenship and the symbolic processes that enable people to speak and name the world. Citizen media therefore hold the potential to amplify subaltern voices in the public sphere in a way that is not possible when the state or only a certain class of professional had access to the means of media production and dissemination. Citizen media make possible daily political action and engagement that is part and parcel of the politics of small things, helping to create an alternative space outside of mainstream political and media institutions for redefining identities, situations and potentialities while developing the capacity for concerted action (Goldfarb 2006). The term citizen journalist builds upon this conceptualization of citizen media and acknowledges that citizen journalism is more often than not a form of activism.

Activism and objectivity

Citizen journalism is public and participatory, and distinct from professional journalism in non-democratic systems in that it typically eschews objectivity as it is particularly concerned with social impact, and thus is used as part of an activism strategy. The activism/journalism dichotomy in Egypt emerged throughout my fieldwork as an important issue. As one blogger explained: "I think all journalists are activists, political activists as well, but the general public is

not activists unless their family is activist" (Badr 2008). In the "mainstream" hegemonic discourse of the Western and particularly American journalism establishment, activism has generally been viewed as being directly at odds with the ideal of professional journalism, in which dominant values like objectivity and balance positions the professional journalist as a neutral observer (Aday, Livingston, and Hebert 2005; Kaplan 2006; Schudson 2001; Schudson 1978; Tuchman 1972). Development journalism, gender journalism, anti-colonialism, and other critical discourses have attempted to interrogate and problematize this notion, and I would argue that citizen journalism does the same. Indeed, the idea that journalists should be objective is not a given, rather it is a socially constructed value that is a product of particular political, economic and social conditions.

The blogosphere, as a field of practice and power, had its own rules about what constituted blogging and citizen journalism and thus what were acceptable and unacceptable practices. Bloggers grappled with the issue of interpreting journalistic ethics for the blogosphere, and whether a blogger "code of ethics" or even a syndicate was needed to address the challenges posed by alternative citizen journalism and the lack of a unified approach to their role in the media ecosystem. Other occupied dual subject positions, working as a professional journalist on the one hand, but blogging and acting as citizen journalists on the other. Some citizen journalists who also worked in the mainstream media, namely Egyptian newspapers, sought to differentiate between platforms- using their journalistic outlets to write about politics and their blogs to write about personal and social issues. They specifically eschewed blogging about politics, a personal choice rather than institutional requirement or regime repression. Some felt politics did not belong on a blog since blogs were about self-expression, while others said they did not feel the need to replicate on their blogs what they had already published in the

newspaper. Others, however, developed beats around specific topics that were quite political. Thus the normative rules of the blogosphere differed from the journalistic field and exemplified far less cohesion and standardization.

Whereas the ideal-typical professional journalist is objective, objectivity is a value that enjoys a far less prominent place among the normative rules of citizen journalism than professional journalism. Objectivity is typically viewed as a regulative rule of journalism and thus as part of what sets off the journalistic form of communication from other forms. The commitment to truthful representation, accuracy, verification, objectivity (though there is often a cynical acknowledgement that subjectivity is inherent to language and the news), are among the ontological commitments upon which the regulative rules of journalism are built. But the idea that journalists should be objective is not a given, rather it is a socially constructed value that is a product of particular political, economic and social conditions (Aday, Livingston, and Hebert 2005; Kaplan 2006; Schudson 2001; Schudson 1978; Tuchman 1972).

But the value of objectivity enjoyed a far less prominent place among the normative rules of citizen journalism than professional journalism, however, and was one way in which these modes of journalism could be distinguished. Firstly, objectivity was seen by many bloggers as an impossible objective. The quote below is illustrative of many such conversations about objectivity in the cybersphere and in the media, and highlights the different regulative rules of journalism versus blogging:

> You can work as a journalist, trying to be objective, *trying* to be objective [emphasis hers]. I don't believe in objectivity. I think that life has no objectivity. Is this perception common? Yes, because we are facing a non-objective world so we don't believe in objectivity. OK. I try to do my best to be objective, not in the blog of course, but as a journalist. As a journalist I read lots of papers around the world. I don't find any objectivity. (Negm 2008)

This quote by a young woman who was both a cyberactivist blogger and a professional journalist highlights the tension between objectivity as an ideal and objectivity as a practice, with the later in fact often being seen as impossible to obtain but nonetheless necessary to rhetorically acknowledge when claiming the identity of professional journalist. In Egypt, and elsewhere, bloggers were interpretive and subjective and disavowed the norm of objectivity because it was inherently at odds with the reason they blogged in the first place.

Many Egyptians blogged specifically as a way to bring attention to issues and events that did not get coverage in the mainstream media, and thus blogging was inherently activism. Thirdly, cyberactivists specifically deployed citizen journalism as part of their repertoires of contention. The citizen journalist was often personally invested in their coverage in a way that profession journalists were not, although this is not to say that both did not struggle with the value of objectivity as an ideal. As Malek put it: "It's not enough simply to write. Blogging must go hand in hand with street action, otherwise it's just empty, useless protest" (Al Malky 2007, 5). The citizen journalist is often invested in the coverage in a way that mainstream journalists are not, yet both struggle with the value of objectivity as an ideal. Citizen journalism thus became a powerful form of cyberactivism as media savvy and impassioned youth co-opted new technologies to do what to many looked like journalism.

Credibility, rather than objectivity, is the currency of citizen journalism. Credibility is what builds a blog's audience and turns them into sources for professional media. As Rettberg observes, journalism is expected to be objective and reliable and relies on institutional credibility, whereas bloggers rely on personal authenticity (Rettberg 2009). Another way of establishing credibility was by providing evidence, performing isnad on this evidence, and building a reputation via such coverage. Many citizen journalists always had a video camera

with them and consistently documented cases of police brutality, human rights abuses, political unrest and other events that built his credibility over time. Nora Younis said her most important tool was her camera-equipped mobile phone because pictures certify words as credible. Abbas said he always carried a camera with him. Videos were particularly important to citizen journalists and bloggers, for as Ikhwan blogger Abdel Monem Mahmoud observed about epistemology in Egypt, video equals fact (2008).

Citizen Journalism in Episodes of Contention

The section analyzes three specific cases of citizen journalism during contentious political episodes and the way that news technologies made particular activist strategies possible. It unearths the dynamics of framing contests over the legitimate portrayal of reality and how the contests over truth and representation produced particular outcomes. By explaining how and why the process of constructing a dominant political narrative or opening up new issues to discussion in the public sphere occurred, this research shows how bloggers constructed joint grievances with the potential to mobilize youth and the public and how particular mechanisms combined to create processes that helped sow the seeds of revolution. The next chapter examines how citizen journalism was used with other cyberactivist strategies. Both these chapters analyze how cyberactivists leveraged citizen journalism as part of their repertoires of contention.

Eid al-Fitr Sexual Attacks

The power of citizen journalism to set the news agenda via blogging and make visible events and issues that the political powers that be would rather remain invisible was starkly evident in the infamous Eid al-Fitr sexual assaults. Prior to ‘appearing’ in the blogosphere,

sexual harassment was politically insignificant. This moment of contention would not only help spur a national movement against sexual harassment, but marked a defining moment in the Egyptian blogosphere, demonstrating the agenda-setting power of blogs with respect to the mainstream media and activating a series of reinforcing mechanisms. It also highlights the way that Mubarak used the media as a central part of his repertoire of hegemony. The analytical description below examines how citizen journalist leveraged social media in framing, amplification and isnad strategies and discusses the impact this had on the blogosphere and the public sphere more broadly.

On October 25, 2006 dozens of women were assaulted on the streets of downtown Cairo by gangs of men while the police just stood and watched.[47] The episode began at the cinema when men who could not get tickets to the show turned their frustration on women. They ripped the veils from the heads of covered Muslim women, a famous actress was groped ad assaulted by a mob of men on a bridge by the Nile and countless others found themselves being surrounded by lustful men while the police stood by and did nothing. The wave of attacks prompted shopkeepers to offer women refuge from the mob, a newsworthy event without doubt. Yet for three days the mainstream media was silent.

A group of Core bloggers that included Wael Abbas, Malek Mustapha and a photographer for Reuters were at a café up the street from Tharir Square when a friend ran in to tell them what was happening, compelling them to go to the streets to witness for themselves and document the crimes being committed against random women (Abbas 2008). "We were all together, but he (Malek) was the first one to write his own remarks on the incident. And then I followed by publishing the photos," Abbas recounted in an interview. This statement illustrates

[47] See accounts from the following blog posts: http://arabist.net/arabawy/2006/10/26/downtowns-sex-predators/; http://t5at5a.blogspot.com/2006/10/blog-post_25.html and http://malek-x.net/node/268

how blogging shared with journalism an emphasis on speed and that those who were first garnered symbolic capital through the recognition of others in the field. Malek, for his part, posted a detailed account with Wael's pictures and links to videos posted on YouTube.[48] Several posted blogs where they wrote about what they saw and provided "proof" in the form of photographs and video. Manalaa posted several blogs about the incident and the role of bloggers in covering it, providing a helpful roundup of coverage (in English) on one of Egypt's most prominent blogs, ensuring that journalists, human rights organizations and other bloggers would have access to information about what really happened. This paragraph from one of their English posts is emblematic of their approach, which involved publishing key information in English when it was part of a broader campaign that would benefit from outside coverage and support. It explicates the isnad of authentication through hyperlinks to a range of credible sources and original witnesses:

> 3arabawy wrote a short post focusing on the role (or lack of) of police. Mechanical crowds did a great job of trying to summarize and dissect all the eyewitness accounts and some of the discussions, a must read. Zenobia searches for a reason and Tarek offers an explanation based on identity and culture while chris finds it hard to believe. Hope links the incident with Sheikh Taj el-Din al-Hilali's sermon that offered the metaphor of women as uncovered meat and men as hungry alley cats.[49]

The mutually reinforcing certification of each other's account through the circular circulation of information and amplification of accounts conferred symbolic capital on those bloggers and on citizen journalism more generally. It also triggered technocertification. Traffic to blogs spiked as news of the attacks spread and Abbas' pictures of the attacks proliferated across the blogosphere and into the mainstream media. More than half a million people visited Misr

[48] http://malek-x.net/node/268

[49] Text reproduced with hyperlinks as originally posted http://www.manalaa.net/eid_a_festival_of_sexual_harrasement

Digital in the two days after the first reports were posted, as the statistics posted on Abbas' blog, shows.[50]

Figure 4 Screenshot of traffic statistics to Misr Digital in October 2006.

For three days the downtown attacks were unacknowledged by the authorities or the news media. "I don't know when the press in Egypt will start talking about the incident of last Tuesday and Wednesday too," Zeinobia posted on her blog Friday, "of course I am talking about the independent opposition newspapers, not the official ones…the big question here [is] Why there was and is official silence on [the] Downtown Sex maniacs outrage??."[51] It was not until Negm, who was invited to be on Mona Shezly's popular talk show *Ashara Massa'an* to talk about a different subject, asked her host why there had been no coverage (Negm 2008).[52] Negm was a journalist and a blogger and invoked personal influence to put professional pressure on her fellow journalist, Shezly, because they occupied subject positions within the journalistic field that endowed the former with the symbolic power to exert pressure. Shezly, a young and ambitious journalist whose show on Dream 2 was one of the most popular in Egypt, decided to find out what happened, and interviewed Malek as well as witnesses from the area (al-Shezly

[50] http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com/archive/2006/10/31/عباس-وائل-على-الأمن-يحرض-جبر-كرم.html

[51] http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.fr/2006/10/and-why-there-is-official-silence-on.html

[52] Wael Abbas posted the episode on his YouTube channel at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAFtE9ozk_0&feature=player_embedded

2006). She appeared less reticent than other, often older colleagues, to investigate the claims by bloggers, again underscoring the important of the generational divide in the dynamics of the journalistic field and one's willingness to engage with new media technologies.

Malek Mustafa, the first blogger to post about the attacks, saw his average of 30 comments per post increase astronomically to 750 on those posts (Al Malky 2007). Together these mechanisms created an agenda-setting process that riffled through the entire media system, from the independent press through the satellite media and finally state news, eventually leading to comprehensive coverage throughout the Arab and Egyptian news media (Zekry 2008). This coverage amplified blogging and certified bloggers as credible information sources. It also helped position blogging more decisively within the journalistic field. "I think it was a euphoria of something new, and it was the reason I was interested in following the blogs as a journalist," explained the political editor of *Al Ahram* (Howeidy 2008). I also think the Western media's obsession with blogs, and there was a lot of talk about democracy and the Arab spring, and there was too much, it was overrated, just because you are a blogger, doesn't' make you an important person. I found myself quoting them myself, they were part of something new, indeed, and then I think everything just fell into place."

This event marked a turning point in the power of the blogs as alternative and credible information sources. It underscored how the power of small things, such as snapping a picture, writing up an eyewitness account or linking to a post, can effectively influence the mass media and even alter the way they function by creating new practices and authority. Bloggers scooped the journalists using journalistic methods. Their reporting prompted the satellite news media and international media to cover what happened. The independent press, including the leading paper of record, *Al Masry Al Youm*, followed the blogs and reported on the attacks, eventually

compelling the Egyptian state press to follow the news lead since they could no longer ignore it, (See for example *ADNKronos International* 2006; El-Khashab 2006; Sheheem 2006). "The online fuss caught the attention of the BBC and eventually other news organizations and talk shows and people in Egypt are a bit more aware about sexual harassment as a result, and things are happening," according to one blogger, whose translation of a detailed Arabic post from Malcolm-X into English brought her "loads and loads of hits and links" (Forsoothsayer 2008). She said she took down the translation when she discovered she was "being quoted as some sort of Muslim-basher." But, she said, "I put it back up after that because my translation assisted the work of real citizen journalists who do hope to raise awareness about this issue." This was a clear example of the amplification and highlights the role that language played in amplifying a post or an issue beyond the linguistic confines of the national or regional public sphere and into the global mediasphere.

The story's initial frame in the Western media was about "uncorroborated" reports of sexual attacks in the streets of Cairo (Clark-Flory 2006). But by providing detailed accounts of what happened on their blogs, accompanied by photos and video of the reported events, most observers eventually agreed that the attacks had indeed taken place. The ubiquity of mobile phone, the immediacy of digitized photos, and the tagging and hyperlinking of online content enabled these first-hand accounts to circulate quickly and widely while making it easy for others to amplify through their own blogs. Mechanical Crowds, for example, published a detailed roundup in English of the eye-witness accounts and opinions on his blog[53] while Manalaa put together an Eid al-Fitr compendium that performed *isnad* by outlining what happened and linked

[53] http://mechanicalcrowds.blogspot.com/2006/10/when-crowds-are-gone.html

to the key witness blogs.[54] This effort to establish the truth of what happened highlights the way in which journalism is expected to be objective and reliable and relies on institutional credibility, whereas bloggers rely on personal authenticity (Rettberg 2009). The blogosphere's role in documenting, publicizing and protesting the abuses was widely credited by bloggers and journalists with compelling mainstream media coverage as well as forcing the government to respond and became a defining story in the blogosphere's history and development.

The state-owned media launched an attack against the bloggers, accusing the "Internet photos" of being falsified and not really showing attacks while the pro-government *Rose al-Youssef* launched a smear campaign against Wael Abbas, calling his accounts merely "sick fantasies" in an attempt to discredit his reporting (Gaber 2006).[55] Abbas meticulously refuted the allegations on his blog, posting pictures of the headlines claiming nothing happened alongside media that eventually did report on the attacks.[56] This decertified the state-owned media by highlighting how they failed to adhere to the regulative rules of journalism while highlighting how bloggers, on the other hand, had done so. Blogging made it far more difficult for the state to use media as instruments of propaganda because there was a new set of watchdogs on the press, with tools that enabled real-time verification and authentification. Indeed, the state-owned *Al Ahram* reported the next week:

> On the first and second day of Eid al-Fitr, Egyptian bloggers reported attacks against women by hordes of young men in downtown Cairo … Bloggers at the scene at the time of the incidents refute the ministry's denials. Blogger Malek Mustafa, also known as Malcolm X, says he witnessed the attacks first hand as mobs of men near the cinema

[54] http://www.manalaa.net/eid_a_festival_of_sexual_harrasement

[55] Wael Abbas covered the campaign on his blog in several posts between Oct. 25 and Nov. 5, 2006, available via his archive at http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com. See also http://www.arabawy.org/2006/10/31/rosa-al-youssef-hits-new-rock-bottom/ for an account of the media coverage.

[56] http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com/archive/2006/10/31/عباس-لواء-على-الأمن-يحرض-جبر-كرم.html

> picked on women at random, encircling them and attempting to tear away their clothing. (El-Khashab 2006)

The Eid sexual assaults were a flagrant example of the regime's ambivalence towards public safety and its attempts at misinformation, energizing the bloggers to write against power. And because the issue affected women, and men, across the ideological spectrum the countervailing public discourse was about the failure of the mainstream media to do their jobs and report what happened. The official *Al Ahram* newspaper finally published an article on November 1 on page three. Bloggers, citizen journalists, had to pick up the slack. They became a huge embarrassment for the regime, which found itself officially denying what many independent citizen journalists had factually documented.

The attacks and the role of the bloggers became a rallying cry for activists and international human rights groups, several of which highlighted the incident in their annual reports on human rights in Egypt. Several bloggers linked the attacks to the regime, as in a post by Zeinobia where she contrasted the massive police presence during youth demonstrations against "dictatorship" with the complete absence of police during the assaults.[57] Alaa and his wife Manal ended their October 30th post with a call to action for social and political justice. This focus on justice and activism highlights objectivity as one of the main tensions between professional and citizen journalism, and a defining differentiation:

> These events cannot pass without being broadcast or made available for the public. We need to let the world know what this government is doing, how it is performing, and where it focuses the taxpayers' money. And the armed forces… The money and police are directed to protect the government officials and leave the public exposed to anything at anytime, they utilize the forces to oppress and abuse protesters or those people who are not yet corrupted.[58]

[57] http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.fr/2006/10/and-why-there-is-official-silence-on.html

[58] http://www.manalaa.net/tv_coverage_of_sexual_assault_fest

This was the event that formalized bloggers as citizen journalists within the international journalistic field. It was during this period that the term “citizen journalist” became fashionable and the Western media started to confer this status on bloggers in general rather than as an identity that is enacted at particular moments. The Eid attacks were a common story told by bloggers and rights organizations that helped construct an identity based on this great accomplishment of bloggers giving breaking down barriers of silence around an issue of public concern, and outperforming the mainstream media. It established their credentials as citizen journalists and propelled them into the mainstream media. So the next year, when similar, though not as large-scale, attacks took place the media quickly followed suit and reported on the sexual assaults. State media could no longer pretend they did not happen.

From this point onward sexual harassment became a topic that could be discussed in the public sphere, even gaining a place on the public agenda. Its construction as a joint grievance provided an issue that a broad swath of the Egyptian public, regardless of political or religious affiliation, could rally around. Sexual harassment became a commonly covered topic in the mainstream media and remained a central focus of cyberactivism. It was during this phase that Egyptian bloggers made a name for themselves in their country and internationally as they focused on publishing articles, photos and videos of demonstrations and videos of torture and state-sponsored violence.

Many citizen journalist bloggers proceeded to become active in organizations and campaigns related to the issue while proactively covering the topic on their blogs, on Facebook and in their Twitter feeds. A 2008 survey by the Centre for Women's Rights in Cairo found that 83 percent of Egyptian women had endured harassment at least once, and that 50 percent of respondents experienced such harassment on a daily basis. In 2008, as Facebook was gaining

momentum, a group called *ana mish muza* (I am not a piece of meat) was started and in 2010 a group of volunteers created Harassmap, a crowdsource mapping project to track incidents of sexual harassment in the streets of Cairo by location, type and frequency and provide real-time information about areas women should avoid.[59] In 2008 the first ever case of sexual harassment made its way to court, and by 2010 draft legislation that would criminalize sexual harassment was making its way through parliament (Zayed 2010). The Ministry of Tourism launched a public awareness campaign in 2008 with a series of commercials implying that the prevalence of sexual harassment could negatively impact tourism, which comprised a significant part of the Egyptian economy.[60] Without the seemingly small act of posting about sexual harassment, the collective effort by citizen journalists to document these cases and bring attention to the issue would not have emerged. Once this collective formed they could and did build alliances with other concerned groups in the human rights community, and eventually work on changing the legal framework. Simultaneously these small but important acts helped change the mindset of bloggers themselves, as they became active on these issues, saw that they could compel mainstream media coverage and highlight the lies of government-controlled media, and ensure that this topic was not longer confined to the silence of the private sphere.

Kolena Laila

Citizen journalism as an activist strategy was not just aimed at the external mainstream media. In the fall of 2006, a group of five young women bloggers created Kolena Leila (We are all Laila), a day of collective blogging to draw attention to discrimination and the experience of

[59] http://www.harasmap.org

[60] http://fantasia4ever.blogspot.fr/2008/09/its-time-to-say-back-off.html

women in Egypt (this was not initially linked with the Eid attacks).[61] Their goal was to help set the agenda of the blogosphere by inundating the blog aggregator Omaneya (run by Alaa and Manal) with posts on the same topic. They hoped to trigger both technological amplification and ijma' around the need to talk about a touchy topic that many people simply denied existed. They figured that blogging would help tear down the barrier of silence that prevented so many ordinary Egyptian women from speaking up about their experience with sexual harassment, as this October 27, 2008 blog post on Manalaa underscored:

> Sexual harassment of women in public spaces has been discussed several times before in the Egyptian blogosphere, everybody knows it's prevalent but **denial flows like a river in Egypt**, any woman dares open the topic has to face an avalanche of abuse on anonymous comments sometimes even from fellow bloggers. [B]laming the victims is the most common response but sometimes they even deny it happens at all, with the abuse also comes more accounts and stories of how it's like to be female in urban Egypt.[62]

The collective movement to blog about it and make sure that women's voices were heard specifically pursued a strategy designed to trigger technological amplification and certification by targeting the algorithmic design of the aggregator. The five young women who created Kolena Laila got to know each other through blogging, but decided to meet in person to arrange the online awareness campaign in September 2006. They invited women from across the Egyptian blogosphere to all post blogs on the same day about their experience being a woman in Egypt. Such a strategy would not have been possible before blogs because it would have relied on mainstream media gatekeepers, the majority of whom were men and affiliated with the state, to grant access to the pages of the press and the airwaves (Byerly 2011, 48). Social media let

[61] http://kolenalaila.com

[62] http://www.manalaa.net/eid_a_festival_of_sexual_harassment. Original formatting and hyperlinks preserved.

them bypass these traditional gatekeepers and gain traction in a way that would have been virtually impossible prior to the post-millennial era.

Eman AbdElRahman, who blogged at Lastro Adri,[63] said in an interview that she had the initial idea of arranging a campaign where female bloggers would write about their feelings because they felt "misunderstood." So she and four other female cyber-friends decided to organize Kolena Laila, named after a famous character in an Egyptian book and film.[64] "We decided to secretly send emails to girls we know, to sit and determine a time and day when we all publish our posts about everything related to girls and women," she explained (AbdElRahman 2008). "And it was very successful. All bloggers were very interested in discussing and expressing that they were with us." She said they contacted about 70 to 75 female bloggers, starting with women they knew, from across the blogosphere and nearly all participated. They attempted to keep the campaign under wraps until its launch on September 9 in hopes it would be a surprise and dissuade men from putting them down.

Their goal was to help set the agenda of the blogosphere by inundating the blog aggregator Omraneya with posts on the same topic. "We depend on this aggregator, we know all bloggers track this aggregator and when we publish on this they would know," Eman explained, underscoring the group's central goal of triggering amplification. "They will see in this page that we are all talking about Kolena Laila – we put it in the title and made a banner." The purpose was not to organize bloggers, an effort viewed with distrust by many bloggers and even as anathema to blogging, but to bring new ideas and discussions into the public realm, as a post on 12 September 2006 explained:

[63] http://lasto-adri.blogspot.com/

[64] The five primary organizers were http://lasto-adri.blogspot.com/, http://bentmasreya.blogspot.com/, http://seekingfreedom.blogspot.com/, http://shaima2.net/, http://epitaph-87.blogspot.com/

> Our choice of the blogsphere is not to create clusters among bloggers. Never! It's actually the opposite! We wanted to take advantage of the free space allowed within the blogsphere for dialogue. We also wanted to build on our credibility as previously established independent bloggers; we are not just a number in foreign equations. We speak of the reality of our personal experiences and not because we are pushed by certain entities to do this. We also emphasize that our blogs will not turn into platforms for one-way directions or thinking that is only interested in Leila's problems. Our blogs started as personal pages that critique and interact with many of the events and views we see on the national scene ... and they will remain so.[65]

The quote above underscores the personal nature of blogging, and the distrust of organized, corporate initiatives in this realm. Indeed the sentiment above underscores again the difference between citizen journalism, in which the personal experience is valued and can signal authenticity and credibility, and professional journalism, in which the reporter is typically not present in the story. For as Zeinab explained, the idea was to talk about a specific subject and create new public discourses. The purpose, she said, was "to make someone who reads this think 'so this is what my daughter or my wife is thinking of. Even if he is against us he will know what we are thinking," because, as the discussion above about the Eid al-Fitr coverage exemplified, the mainstream media certainly did not do so (Zeinab 2008). "So the message has to be directly from our mouths to his ears," she added. The initiative setting of a firestorm of debate and frank exchanges between male bloggers and their female counterparts. Gr33ndata, for example, wrote about the campaign in English and Arabic and called for women to communicate in a style men could understand: clearly and directly.[66]

Zeinab, one of the five main organizers of the first Kolena Laila blogging day, was a cyberactivist but did not join any demonstrations outside of the virtual public sphere, choosing instead to use her blog as her platform to speak out on an issue about which she was

[65] http://kolenalaila.com/en/blog/archives/category/2006

[66] See for example http://gr33ndata.blogspot.com/2006/09/laila-call-for-comments.html

impassioned: women's experiences with discrimination and harassment. "It's an issue people wrote about, but I don't think girls were talking about their personal experience, they were talking generally," she said in an interview. "But after this I think there were girls who talked about what really happened to them and discovering that talking about being brave and not be afraid to talk about experience."

Following the success of the campaign they created an aggregate website that became the platform for the "initiative to devote a day, annually, to speak up about the problems facing oppressed women in the Arab region. On that day, bloggers publish posts under the title of 'We are all Laila' to raise awareness and discuss the concerns of women in Arab societies."[67] They designed banners and graphic logos for the cyber-campaign, like the ones pictured below, and when Facebook emerged they created a page through which they organized, connected with supporters and posted photos and other content of interest.[68] After the first successful event, they turned the campaign into an annual day of blogging and eventually sought registration as an NGO.

Kolena Laila eventually attracted the attention of other citizen journalism collectives like Global Voices (which played a bridging role by translating some of their posts into English in 2008),[69] feminist news services,[70] and even won an award in 2010 related to the Millennium Development Goals.[71] This citizen journalism initiative would not have been possible without

[67] http://kolenalaila.com/en/about

[68] https://www.facebook.com/kolenalaila

[69] http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/10/11/egypt-we-are-all-laila/

[70] Such as Young Feminist News Wire in 2010, http://yfa.awid.org/2010/04/blogging-initiative-amplifies-voices-of-young-arab-women/

[71] The World Summit Youth Award (WSYA) is a follow up activity of the United Nations' World Summit on Information Society and recognizes young digital entrepreneurs.

the availability of blogging and social media networks, and underscores again the personal and collective empowerment that blogging triggered.

Figure 5 Kolena Leila logos. Permission for use granted by Eman AbdElRahman under the CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 unported license

The Emad al-Kabir Torture Video

Torture was another endemic but unspoken problem in Egypt during the time of study, particularly by the police (*Tortue in Egypt 2003-2006* 2006; *Universal periodic review Egypt* 2009). But it was an issue not talked about in the public sphere, confined to the private sphere both by media and victims, who were often too scared to speak out. Although there were non-governmental organizations and human rights groups that attempted to track incidences of torture, it was widely seen as a topic that was off limits in the press and the public sphere. Citizen journalism, however, broke down this barrier and helped it become a topic that could be spoken about and publicly condemned. This was due to a wide range of blogging about torture, but one incident in particular stands out. In 2007, a video that was sent to Abbas of police sodomizing mini-bus driver Emad al-Kabir with a rod as be screamed and begged for mercy. The

officers apparently sent the video they shot with a mobile phone to Kabir's coworkers in January 2006 to humiliate him; in 2007 it went viral. Fellow blogger Mohammed Khaled, who blogged at Demaghmak (Mak's Brain), initially posted the video after inadvertently discovering it while trolling through a friend's collection of cell-phone videos. This small act had profound repercussions.

Abbas posted the video on his site, which had begun making a reputation for itself as the go-to site for videos of human rights abuses, and YouTube channel, propelling it into the blogosphere and setting off a maelstrom that provoked coverage in international mainstream media outlets including the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Time* magazine and CNN.[72] Although Abbas said he appreciated the coverage he lamented the fact that the issue did not garner the same attention in the domestic media, which once again gave far less coverage to the incident that the international media. The amplification by well-respected international media outlets provided certification and symbolic capital in the form of heightened attention to Abbas and other bloggers blogging about human rights. It also raised the costs for the Mubarak regime of taking action against them as well as refusing to take action against the abuser.

This did not mean that the state did not attempt to discredit and intimidate Abbas and other citizen journalists, trying to deter them from committing future acts of journalism. Interior Minster Habib al-Adly attempted to mitigate the impact of the video, saying in a statement, posted by Sandmonkey on his blog, that he considered those reporting cases of torture "to be an intended unpatriotic campaign to hit a national service that seeks stability in the country."[73] Another official with the Interior Ministry told Al Hiwar TV that bloggers could face legal action

[72] See for example http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBdglRJ9aZY

[73] http://www.sandmonkey.org/2007/01/29/bloggers-are-unpatriotic-reputation-tarnishers/

under a law prohibiting publication of information that defames the country, threatening that ``If you turn blogs into news Web sites [*sic*], you have to stick to media ethics, or you could risk legal repercussions."[74] The 'if' however, was clearly misplaced since by 2007 blogs had indeed become news websites, although no charges were brought against the bloggers. Indeed, the ambiguous space occupied by citizen journalists provided some degree of maneuver and the contention over whether they count as media or not made it more challenging to clearly apply regulations related to professional journalism to bloggers.

Publication of the torture video in the blogosphere eventually led to the conviction of the offending police officers and international acknowledgment. Such a conviction was unheard of, yet the fact that posting videos online resulted in the first such outcome had a powerful certification effect and impacted the self-perceptions of bloggers themselves, who often referred to this episode as evidence of the empowering potentiality and impact of blogging. It also made visible public grievances over torture and other human rights abuses, putting this issue firmly on the public agenda. Although Abbas said he thought there was a lack of coverage about the case domestically, it got plenty of attention in the international media and was enough to put pressure on the regime to acknowledge the existence of and hold accountable those responsible for torture. No longer could the regime, or the public, deny the existence of torture because citizen journalism had made it visible and in doing so made it political.

This event triggered what I call a powerful "certification cascade," building upon the idea of information cascades in social movement literature (Lohmann 1994, Siegal 2005). Abbas' coverage earned him the accolade of becoming the first blogger to win the prestigious International Center For Journalists (ICFJ) Knight Journalism Award. ICFJ's description of why

[74] http://english.freecopts.net/english//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=436&Itemid=2

it gave Abbas the award elucidated the journalistic rules and how these were performed by a blogger. Abbas "regularly breaks stories on subjects generally avoided by local media, such as protests, corruption, and police brutality. His vivid first-hand reports, videos and photographs have attracted thousands of readers and the attention of mainstream news outlets, which have begun to pick up his hard-hitting stories."[75] He went on to gain numerous accolades for his journalism and has been invited all over the world to discuss citizen journalism. Such awards further contributed to the accumulation of symbolic capital not only by the individual blogger but to bloggers and the blogosphere more broadly. Some awards also came with cash prizes, $40,000 in the case of the Knight award, which helped sustain the unpaid citizen journalists who often refused to accept advertising or other forms of economic compensation for their work.

Abbas called his blog (in Arabic) "An Independent Egyptian Weekly, but by 2006 had added the tagline "An Independent Egyptian Weekly Electronic Newspaper" with a masthead identifying himself as "Editor in Chief" but which he later shortened – in English—to "An Independent Egyptian Weekly E-Newspaper" and as of 2011 to "Blogger in Chief" of "An Independent Egyptian Blog". He previously worked for Al Destor and the Deutsch Press Agency, and sought to replicate many of the same journalistic values he adhered to in those mainstream media outlets on his blog (Abbas 2008). He drew on the symbolic power of the journalistic field by framing his blog as a newspaper and his role as akin to that of editor. The blogger and journalism communities validated this certification. Bloggers across the reliogiopolitical spectrum hold him up as an exemplar of blogger and citizen journalist, as have journalistic organizations around the world by honoring him with awards and inviting him to speak.

[75] http://knight.icfj.org/Awards/KnightAwardsPastWinners/WaelAbbas/tabid/807/Default.aspx

The Emad al-Kabir torture incident was just one among many, however, that bloggers sought justice for by highlighting through their blogs. Noha Atef's Torture in Egypt blog, as discussed in Chapter Four, was an example of a sustained citizen journalism effort devoted to the topic. Their focus on torture and other human rights abuses and the demonstrated ability to have the perpetrators brought to trial was a powerful message to the Egyptian public more broadly, and redefined the issue of torture as one of regime impunity to that of empowerment and unacceptability. Whereas people did not dare to talk about torture in the past, following the Emad al-Kabir case they not only talked about it but they fought against it, taking cases to court and attempting to hold the Mubarak regime responsible in a visible contest to change the structural conditions under which it was somehow acceptable for the regime to torture its citizens.

As Abbas noted in a 2010 interview with BBC's Hardtalk, there was a marked rise in the number of ordinary citizens bringing cases of torture against the police through the criminal court system, which had never happened to such an extent before, a fact also documented by human rights groups, (Badawi 2010; Amnesty International 2008).[76] Coverage of torture by citizen journalists not only brought these cases to the fore but also served to educate people about their rights and give them hope that justice could be sought, contributing to a expectation shift in the broader public sphere.

Military Tribunals and the rise of ENSAA

One of the most influential examples of Ikhwan activism was the *Ensaa* blog, which provided a forum for the sons and daughters of imprisoned MB leaders to blog and engage in citizen journalism about the military tribunals their fathers faced as well as a window into a

[76] http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com/archive/2010/01/13/wael-abbas-on-bbc-hardtalk.html

highly secretive process. These young men and women created *Ensaa* as a citizen journalism platform and it became the first blog created to cover the military tribunals. In this case the fact that the bloggers were not professional journalists was a boon because journalists could not gain access. Media were barred from the jail and courtroom, so only the families of detainees were allowed to get close to the accused, giving them exclusive access that the founder of *Ensaa* realized would be a valuable asset in the journalistic field.

Bloggers posted pictures and videos of their imprisoned fathers and the trial, along with text describing the scenes, emphasizing the former because of the belief of its founder that "pictures say much much much more than whatever you can write" (al-Sherkawey 2008). Mainstream media like *Al Masry al Youm* and *Al Destor* amplified the blog, expanding the blog's reach beyond the blogosphere and into the unconnected populace at large. Media, especially websites and Ikhwanonline.com, the official Muslim Brotherhood English website, turned to *Ensaa* as a key source, reprinting the pictures and ensuring they reached a wider audience, though they often declined to credit the original source (al-Sherkawey 2008; al-Zakhy 2008). When the blog received credit, however, it gained authority and credibility and became a key node in the virtual isnad network created through the blogosphere through hyperlinked articles, trackbacks, re-Tweets and other discursive networks. The same pattern was seen throughout the period of study and more broadly in the case of coverage of the trials of fellow bloggers and activists, providing far more in-depth coverage than their mainstream media counterparts. "They monitor the trials. I was following the minute details," *NPR* quoted Egyptian sociologist Said Sadek as saying (Amos 2010). Without amplification by bloggers, these stories and their social justice frames would have been far less significant in the broader public sphere.

Some fathers recognized the advantage their children's blogs granted them to publicize alternate versions of the official story, to ensure their stories were recorded in history and attempt to bring the scrutiny that might set them free. The father of Alaa, a young woman in her early twenties from Sharqiya, occasionally wrote messages on paper in jail and passed it to her from jail to publish on her blog. He was able to communicate with the world at large by coupling old-fashioned note-smuggling with modern communication technology. A young woman in the rural countryside of Egypt was able to actively help her father, in prison, by disseminating his message to millions of people worldwide and garner support within minutes. Such cross-generational efforts to publicize and protest represented a new process of contention in which the virtual public sphere played a central role. Without these new ICTs the mainstream, state-dominated media would have had a monopoly on the information coming out of the trial, since the MB did not have their own mainstream media outlets and in any case journalists were not allowed in to cover the trial and thus were dependent on the state to provide information. Citizen media changed this. It also contributed to the construction of widespread, cross-ideational opposition to military trials for civilians, helping to construct the denial of justice and due process as a joint grievance shared by Egyptians across the religiopolitical spectrum.

Creation of the Category of Citizen Journalist

Whether a practice constitutes journalism or somebody can claim to be a journalist is a point of contention where power struggles to define and name occur, and where the outcome can imbue particular actors and practices with power resources typically reserved for the journalistic field. This subject position is situated in relationship to fields of power and enables access to

certain resources, certification mechanisms and forms of symbolic capital. For example, citizen journalists can get access to transnational human rights groups and emergency assistance funds, journalism prizes, and advocacy, as I explain below. Citizen journalists could activate specific series of mechanisms and trigger responses that empowered them.

The increasingly influential role of bloggers and cyberactivists during the post-millennial period elucidates why the question of whether or not blogging constituted a form of journalism became so contentious in Egypt during the time of study. Not all content is journalistic, and not all bloggers are citizen journalists. Indeed, the distinction between bloggers who engaged in sustained journalistic activity and others who flitted in and out of it or became accidental citizen journalists is an important one. The following section first analyses why this distinction matters, then analyzes the different roles played by international rights organizations and media organizations in the certification process.

In my conceptualization, 'citizen journalist' refers to a subject-position that bloggers who performed a particular type of blogging that adhered to the regulative rules of journalism occupied whereas citizen journalism was an act or set of practices that could be momentary or sustained. The latter were only tangentially situated in relation to the journalistic field whereas the former were positioned within the field and thus subject to the same power dynamics that constituted its relations of power. ICTs enabled both the practice and the identity, but there were important dynamics that distinguished the former from the later and thus made possible citizen journalism as a form of cyberactivism. The immediacy, connectivity, peer-to-peer sharing, social media amplification and circular circulation of information were on a scale unheard of prior to the introduction of Internet-based ICTs, as outlined in the four episodes described above.

Citizen Journalism Versus Citizen Journalists

Those who engaged in acts of citizen journalism, versus those who developed identities and subject positions as citizen journalists, lacked the same power to trigger agenda-setting, amplification or other mechanisms as those bloggers who identified themselves or were identified by others as citizen journalists. The latter consistently published news that was credible and newsworthy, adhering to some key regulative rules of journalism, such as veracity, facticity, verification and accuracy, and thus positioning them within the field. Abbas, for example, focused on human rights and political activism, including several high-profile scoops. Over time he built up a cadre of sources who sent him information and videos about police violence and human rights violations, much in the way the *New York Times* attracts whistleblowers. In August 2007, for example, he published a blog post about the torture of a 12-year-old boy by police.[77] In the post he interviewed the boy's mother, provided pictures of the alleged abuse, including graphic images of the boys buttocks and testicles showing where he was beaten and electrocuted, and gave permission for their republication and distribution. This post was typical of his approach to journalistic coverage of human rights abuses, and earned him credibility and attention that enhanced his authority as a trustworthy, hard-hitting citizen journalist and enacted the certification mechanism. Permitting content to be freely posted, such as with a Creative Commons share and share alike license, strengthened amplification and the framing role within the blogosphere and between the professional journalistic field and the blogosphere. Others were inspired by a cause to devote their free time to documenting and reporting on a particular human rights issue, much like a journalistic beat. Hamalawy, for example, covered labor rights, protests and the socialist causes, documenting in details the rising

[77] http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com/archive/2007/08/14

number of labor protests after 2006. Atef covered the torture beat, Abdel Monem the Muslim Brotherhood beat, and so on.

But new ICTs also enabled anyone to momentarily engage in citizen journalism. Acts of citizen journalism include randomly capturing newsworthy events or eyewitness accounts, by blogging, tweeting, snapping a picture or taking a video of an incident of police brutality or a labor strike and posting or sharing online. Without the ubiquity of mobile phones, the ease of online photo and video sharing, and the amplification power of social networks, such acts would have been disconnected from each other and contributed in much smaller ways to the construction of joint grievances. Still others flitted in and out of citizen journalism, doing it when the moment strikes, like *Lastro Adri* and *Wounded Girl From Cairo*.[78] The latter, for example, started a short-lived blog after being sexually assaulted in the streets of Cairo. She wanted to document what happened; "I am here to tell my story of how badly I got sexually harassed and how it ended!" read her profile, but soon lost interest after getting engaged and moving to the United States.[79] Yet her blog remained, and the 59 comments she received on her first post remain as testament to the fact that through blogging she was make her story part of the narrative about the Eid al-Fitr attacks on Global Voices and countless other blogs and reports. Although her articulation as citizen journalist was transitory, it remained archived in cyberspace.

The ability of citizen journalists to activate sequences of mechanisms highlights the importance of their relation to the journalistic field. Bloggers who did not practice citizen journalism were less likely to trigger sequences like self-certification → framing, certification → amplification, because they lacked access to symbolic power such as reputation and distinction,

[78] http://woundedgirlfromcairo.blogspot.com/

[79] http://www.blogger.com/profile/00310045476523519609

did not trigger technological certification and did not have access to the network of mainstream media and international NGOs that certified and amplified citizen journalism.

Some of Egypt's most active citizen journalists who were instrumental in launching citizen journalism as a form of cyberactivism are listed below with the main blog they used during the period of study. Several citizen journalists created their own YouTube channels and turned their Twitter feeds into virtual news wires by sending out minute-by-minute updates during key moments of contention. In these moments they activated framing and amplification mechanisms, and when their content or opinion became part of the news cycle the mainstream media certified them as worthy of attention. Although cyberactivists nearly all covered the social movement that was emerging, several of them developed 'beats', such as torture, human rights or labor, Muslim Brotherhood politics, etc., becoming known for their coverage of certain topics and earning credibility and popularity through their ongoing, original, specialized and trustworthy reporting.

Table 2 Egypt's first generation of citizen journalists

Name	Professional Experience	Blog URL	Twitter
Wael Abbas	Deutsche Welle	www.misrdigital.com	@waelabbas
Hossam el-Hamalawy	Los Angeles Times	www.3arabawy.net	@3arabawy
Abdel Monem Mahmoud	Al Destor	ana-ikhwan.blogspot.com	
Gemyhood		www.gemhood.com	@gemyhood
Alaa Abdel Fattah and Manal Hassan		www.manalaa.net	@alaa and @manal
Noha Atef	Al Destor	tortureinegypt.blogspot.com	@NohaAtef
Shahinaz Abdel Salam		wa7damasrya.blogspot.com	@wa7damasrya
Nora Younis	Washington Post; AMAY	www.noryounis.net	@NoraYounis
Ahmed Abd al-Fatah		yallaly.blogspot.com	@AhmedFatah
Malek Mustafa		www.malek-x.net	@MaLek
Nawara Negm	Al Wafd	tahyyes.blogspot.com	
Zeinobia		www.egyptianchronicles.net	@zeinobia
Mina Zekri		egyptianwatchman.blogspot.net	@minazekri
Demagh Mak	Al Destor		@demaghmak
Abdulrahman Mansour	Al Jazeera	the-earth-correspondent.blogspot.com	@amansour87
Amr Magdi	Al Jazeera		@ganobi
Salma Said		salomatakmatak.blogspot.com	@salmasaid
Ahmed Naje	Al Akbar Al Sbaba; Akhbar Al Yom		
Mohammed Morsey		digressing.blogspot.com	
Tarek Amr		Gr33ndata.blogspot.com	@gr33ndata
Sarah Carr	Daily News Egypt	allthegoodnameshadgone.blogspot.com	@sarahcarr
Abdelrahman Ayyash	Al Jazeera	al-ghareeb.blogspot.com	@3yyash
Eman Abdelmenem	IslamOnline; Al Destor	almwatn.blogspot.com	
Amr Ezzat		mabadali.blogspot.com	@AmrEzzat
Abdullah Sadek al-Sherkawy		www.freedomcost.com and www.ensaa.com	

Naming as Certification

Following the 2006 Eid al-Fitr attacks a new category of people emerged in the public consciousness – bloggers – and each subsequent episode of contentious politics helped strengthen this identity. The media reported on stories involving bloggers and recognition of the category of 'blogger' as an organizational identity frame expanded. International human rights organizations equated them with an existing identity category that could be named, invoked, and politicized – they were citizen journalists. This designation bestowed authoritative status on bloggers, giving them a level of distinction that set them apart from the public en masse and bestowing them with symbolic capital. As such they became beneficiaries of the advocacy and exposure granted professional journalists by international human rights groups that had built up symbolic capital over many years through their advocacy on freedom of expression and journalist safety. They reported on their issues, published press releases, advocated for their freedom and protection, pressured governments on their behalf and offered them the resources of their transnational activist networks and invoked their normative power on behalf of cyberactivists and citizen journalists. Such connections between Egyptians and influential transnational advocacy groups were part of what Ghobashy calls the "internationalization of Egyptian politics," belying theories of regime stability by lending "activists and ordinary citizens unexpected political leverage in their asymmetric share of public power with the executive" (2008, 1593).

Because of the different positions that professional and citizen journalists occupy, they have access to different types of capital. Professional journalists can more easily translate their capital into certification, for example by hiring a blogger as a stringer or republishing content,

whereas citizen journalists did not play a certification role with their professional counterparts. They did, however, possess symbolic capital that they could use in an attempt at decertification, for example by dissecting falsehoods in specific news articles or aggregating examples of biased or inaccurate coverage.

The Certification Role of International Freedom of Expression Organizations

International advocacy groups like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and other organizations spoke on behalf of bloggers and citizen journalists, articulating by proxy the existence and power of a new group and thus helping to constitute this group through performative statements. They equated what bloggers were doing with journalism, demanding the release of imprisoned bloggers on free expression grounds, and honoring bloggers as journalists. Just as these organizations' linkages with an emergent human rights community in the 1980s and 90s helped mobilize international norms on behalf of domestic actors, in the 2000s these networks contributed to citizen journalists and cyberactivists being seen "as disproportionately influential political actors on the domestic scene" (El-Ghobashy 2008, 1593).

CPJ and RSF were particularly significant in this respect, since both organization are specifically concerned with journalists. CPJ, for example, was founded by US foreign correspondents to protect journalists "[b]y publicly revealing abuses against *the press* and by acting on behalf of imprisoned and threatened *journalists*" (emphasis added), according to its website. In February 2005, CPJ published its first press release about a blog (in Bahrain) and put out a release expressing concern about Iran's crackdown on "Internet writers" or bloggers.[80] By

[80] http://cpj.org/2005/02/bahrain.php and http://cpj.org/2005/02/Internet-writers-imprisoned-harassment-continues.php

including bloggers in its advocacy, and not differentiating them from journalists, CPJ constituted bloggers as a group belonging to the same category as journalists. Similarly, RSF says on its website that it "**defends** journalists and media assistants imprisoned or persecuted for doing their job and exposes the mistreatment and torture of them in many countries… [and] works to improve the safety of journalists" (emphasis in original). By including bloggers and blogs in it protection and advocacy strategies, the preeminent journalist organizations were engaged in a symbolic struggle against repressive governments for what Bourdieu called the monopoly over legitimate naming; these groups called them journalists whereas the state called them activists or dissidents.

The enactment of the journalistic identity invokes certain rights and privileges and connected bloggers into a network of cyberactivists who use their journalistic accounts as the raw material of their activism. In fact, blogging "helped many bloggers here in Egypt to take their writing to the next level" as Tarek Amr put it in a blog post reflecting on Egypt's Generation Y.[81] "Some bloggers are journalist [*sic*] now, some other became writers and they had their own writings being published in books," he wrote, going on to list a few: Rehab Bassam, Mina Girgis, Nermeen Idrees, Dina El Hawary, and Ahmed Nagy.

In 2008 RSF launched a World Day Against Cyber-Censorship and created a prize to honor a "blogger, online journalist or cyber-dissident" for promoting online of freedom of expression. CPJ, RSF and the other groups who advocated on behalf of bloggers enacted the symbolic capital they had acquired in previous struggles, using it in the symbolic struggle for the production of common sense about what bloggers were and the place they occupied in the Egyptian public sphere. This "performative power of designation, of naming, brings into

[81] http://notgr33ndata.blogspot.com/2008/12/egyptian-generation-y.html

existence in an instituted constituted form what until then was just a collection of juxtaposed individuals" enabling them to act collectively and become endowed with symbolic capital garnered through standing up for free expression in a repressive system (Bourdieu 1989, 23). Yet this capital was disproportionately bestowed upon English-language citizen journalists who had the linguistic resources to network and advocate with transnational advocacy groups and international media outlets. As one Muslim Brotherhood blogger lamented, "Amnesty International only knows the bloggers who blog in English" (Abdelmenem 2008). Although this was somewhat of an overstatement, since many organizations like Amnesty, RSF, CPJ and HRW had correspondents in Egypt or the wider MENA region, there was significantly more attention paid to bloggers who could transcend the linguistic divide and whose posts, tweets and videos were accessible to a wider non-Arabic speaking audience.

When the Egyptian and Western press "discovered" the Egyptian blogosphere, they helped bridge the digital divide separating bloggers from the general public. But the mainstream Egyptian media, which was largely state-owned or controlled and dominated by an older generation of journalists, lagged behind, reticent to yield the authority of the journalistic field and often simply unaware of the movement that was growing around them. In many democracies, however, the mainstream media and citizen journalism have formed a symbiotic relationship, with professional media actively recruiting citizen journalists and open-source content and providing forums where these open-source projects are featured as well as integrating them into their day-to-day reporting (for example Allan, Sonwalkar, and Carter 2007). This open source, collaborative journalism coincided with a much more challenging economic climate in which traditional print media have struggled to maintain profitability and survive in the Internet age. Professional journalists in the West had ceded some of their authority

as gatekeepers and trained professionals in the recognition that "news can happen anywhere at any time," as the BBC put it in their call for citizen-produced content. The media as the "fourth estate" assumed its role as the public's "eyes and ears," but citizen and participatory journalism inverts this line of reasoning, calling on the public to by journalists' eyes and ears instead. The BBC even says: "We want you to be our eyes"[82] while CNN said its iReports were "an invitation to share your story, be heard and shape what CNN covers."[83]

But there was a lag time between certification by transnational activist organizations and domestic media, and between the time that the independent Egyptian and pan-Arab media began this process and the time when the mainstream (state-dominated) journalistic field did so. This meant that while bloggers may have been able to garner some symbolic capital with currency in the international arena, at home this capital did not really begin accruing in a way that could translated into meaningful capital in the domestic journalistic field until the mainstream media in Egypt validated their role and often reluctantly designated bloggers first as a category and subsequently as performing roles similar at times to that of a journalist.

The Journalistic Field in Egypt: Media Contestation & Framing

If, as Bourdieu argues, objective power relations tend to reproduce themselves in views of the social world that contribute to the permanence of these social relations, then it not surprising that professional journalists were reticent to admit bloggers into the journalistic field. Hegemony over the broadcast media was an important form of symbolic power for the Egyptian state. The media had the power to reproduce the objectivity of power relations in the Egyptian state, and thus when bloggers gained access to the journalistic field they were able to undermine

[82] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/2780295.stm

[83] http://ireport.cnn.com/faq.jspa#ireportdiff

the reproduction of these objective power relations, contributing to a feeling of impermanence in the social relations of the field. The journalistic field is relational, and thus "the production of content must be understood as deriving from a specific competition between producers," such as that between professional journalists and citizen journalists (Vermehren 2004). As mainstream media increasingly use the content created by citizen journalists and certified it as "journalistic" in the process, the journalistic field becomes harder to define and the distinction journalists enjoy from their position lessens. And indeed the certification of citizen journalism results in the acknowledgement and potential certification of the values of the blogosphere.

One editor at the state-run *Al Ahram Weekly* said she would occasionally quote a blogger when blogging was a new phenomenon, or if the blogger was relevant to her story, but qualified her use of them as "sources with dubious credentials" by adding: "Anyone of us can start a blog and then they become bloggers" (Howeidy 2008). True, anyone can start a blog, but it took time and effort to build a reputation as a citizen journalist. Others discounted bloggers because they were young, not professional, or because regular people did not have the time to read blogs, and thus only an elite intellectual class in the mid-2000s were consuming blogs as part of their news diet (Abul-Azm 2006, El Boraai 2006, Howeidy 2008, Kassem 2006).

As Rugh and others have observed, Egyptian and Arab journalism more generally has been slow to develop and professionalize and has never achieved the high reputational status it attained in the West (Pintak 2011; Rugh 2004, 10). Thus it is perhaps not surprising that the development of a professional field and thus a journalistic identity over the previous decade created a situation where those in the field sought to deny access to others who would seek to change the constitutive rules, as through blogging. Whereas in the West, for example, the imperative to include more public input into the news media was in some ways a response to the

increased institutionalization of journalism as a profession, in Egypt and the rest of the Middle East, the professionalization of journalism has occurred relatively recently and thus media and journalists have been less amenable to "undermining" their privileged identity as curator of what the public should know (Mellor 2005, Pintak 2011). Indeed the prevalence of censorship, state funding of the media, and the interest of journalists in keeping their jobs have detracted from the ability of the press and journalists to exert their independence, which is a key component of professionalism (Nkrumah 2006, Mellor 2011, Ramaprasad 2006, Vogt 2002).

Al Jazeera's Certification Role

The field of journalism drastically evolved during the time period under study as the satellite media revolution continued amid the rise and expansion of the Internet and the publication of several independent newspapers. New voices and perspectives were present in the independent and online press as well as the pan-Arab news station Al Jazeera, which was critical in activating three key mechanisms: amplification, certification and framing. With respect to the last mechanism, Al Jazeera saw itself as a channel that challenged entrenched authorities and thus often ended up adopting a sympathetic or certifying frame in stories about cyberactivists. Because of its symbolic power in the journalistic field, Al Jazeera also helped exert pressure on Egyptian journalists to engage with blogs and to incorporate user generated content and citizen journalism more broadly.

The network had a significant impact on Egyptian journalism both in terms of the competitive standards it set and the ability to reach large swaths of the public, becoming the Egyptian public's primary TV news source as it went head-to-head with the Egyptian network (Radsch 2007b). "We cannot deny that there has been improvement in news output in this chance over the past few years, but I think the ratings Al Jazeera enjoys, followed by Al Arabiya, in the

Middle East, I can still say that people trust satellite channels much more they can do with their own government channels or local stations when it comes to news," Al Jazeera's Egyptian Cairo bureau chief Amro El- Kahky confirmed in an interview (2006). Although the state-owned Egyptian Network continued to attract some viewers, only 10 percent said they watched it first for news, and 25 percent watched it second (Telhami and International 2005b), meaning that these viewers were likely to compare the government news with the other news channels they were watching, making it critical for state-owned outlets to adopt the approaches of more popular stations, from live coverage to modern sets to breaking news and user-generate content (Radsch 2007c).

In 2005, Al Jazeera broadcast a documentary about Egyptian bloggers called *Al-Modaweneen Al-Arab: Al-Moa'rada Bi Sawt Jadid (The Arab Bloggers: Opposition with a New Voice),* which dramatically increased awareness among journalists and the general public about blogging and its political impact. Many bloggers pointed to this documentary on the Arab world's most watched and trusted channel as a key moment, crediting Al Jazeera with bridging the digital divide through its coverage on television. Several of them said that was how their parents and friends came to understand more about what they did as bloggers. The program focused on the effect of blogs on political reform in Egypt, and as one blogger noted, "it really had a dramatic effect on public awareness so more people knew what blogging was. I think my mother didn't know what blogging was until she watched the movie. Around that time lots of Islamic activists started to be aware of blogging and the effect of writing on the Internet" (Magdi 2008). As another blogger explained:

> I think it [blogging] started to transcend Internet connectivity because TV started to talk about bloggers and campaigns on blogs, in addition to newspapers and of course SMS. And I think it's no more limited concerning the middle class and

> rich class. As for poor people of course it's limited because they don't even read papers or watch TV. They're not here. (Negm 2008)

Another important moment of domestic certification came from one of Egypt's most famous political commentators, Mohammed Heikal, in a 2006 interview with Al Jazeera when he referred to the political analysis of blogger Baheyya as better than any journalist. This not only popularized her individual blog, but blogging more generally. As he told *Al Ahram*: "many bloggers contacted me to tell me that after I talked about Baheyya they too decided to start blogging, and the phenomenon expanded" (Heikal speaks to Al-Ahram 2011). Such certification by a respected and senior journalist provided symbolic capital to bloggers.

Nonetheless, certification was contested and did not translate into immediate widespread acceptance. Several of the media professionals I interviewed in 2006 and even 2008 in the independent, state, and pan-Arab media dismissed the importance of bloggers in Egypt's media ecology. Some discounted citizen journalists because of the medium in which they worked: the Internet. For example, two experienced correspondents for the Saudi-owned Al Arabiya news station based in Egypt said they did not read blogs much or cover them because they felt that given low Internet penetration rates in Egypt and the Arab world they had limited impact and influence (Abu Hazem 2006; Charters 2007). "I don't think that [blogging] is very important because let me tell you that the Internet following here, this is very limited… so we are talking a very small percentage," explained Hazem in a 2006 interview. Blogging "has a future and will play a role, but it is limited for the time being," Bilbassy-Charters said it in a 2007 interview. Yet the percentage of Egyptians who read newspapers was also very small – only 24 percent of families said they read the newspaper in 2010 (Abdel Salam 2010). Such analysis did not

account for the symbiotic relationship between mainstream media and blogs and the circular circulation of information that was already visible by mid-decade.

Certification by Domestic Independent Media

The year 2007 was a turning point in the independent domestic media's certification of citizen journalism. *Al Destour,* a paper that was generally hostile to the government, was one of the first papers to provide significant coverage of blogs, playing a crucial role in the certification processes. It initiated a "blog page" to introduce the Egyptian blogosphere to a larger public, although newspaper readership was quite limited in Egypt. Since only about 12 percent of the population was online at that point, then-editor Ihab al-Zakhy decided to create the blog page to bring attention to the blogs and give them wider readership. He would reprint entire blog entries in the newspaper (al-Zakhy 2008). Al-Zakhy, brought the same approach to *Al Masry Al Youm* when he moved there not long after. In 2007, cyberactivist and visual artist Gemy Beshir, who went by the moniker of his blog, Gemyhood, became editor of the online version of *Al Destor* following an internship at the U.S.-based *Slate* magazine, helping to bring blogs into the editorial process there. The creation of such a position was a form of certification of blogs as journalistic and positioned blogs and bloggers within the journalistic field.

The independent English-language *Daily News Egypt* was another important media outlet in the certification of bloggers as citizen journalists as it provided an outlet for them and played a bridging role with transitional English-speaking audiences. Rania Al Malky took over as editor in mid-2007, shortly after receiving her masters in England where she wrote her dissertation on Egyptian blogs and started a blog aggregator called the Egyptian Blog Ring. She made human rights coverage a top priority, giving articles about protests, abuse and other related issues near-automatic front-page coverage (Al Malky 2008). Human rights, along with Gaza and business,

featured as the top three subjects covered in the paper, unlike other papers that did not devote nearly as much coverage to the issue (Cooper 2008). Since bloggers were also focused on human rights so often times their agendas overlapped. *Daily News* journalists aggressively covered the blogosphere and aligned themselves with the opposition and activists through its coverage and take on stories, though it professed independence. And indeed the paper's coverage underscored Hamalawy's observation that independent journalism is a form of activism

The leftist daily *Al Badeel,* which began publishing in 2008, was another important certification and amplification platform while it existed in the heady months of 2008 and 2009, as the April 6 movement was developing and cyberactivism was making its impact felt. According to one of Egypt's most renowned analysts and bloggers *Baheyya, Al Badeel* "aspire[d] to buck the sensationalist trend by offering readers concrete policy alternatives and quality investigative reporting."[84] It was barred from joining the press syndicate but its journalists worked hard to cover the protests and worker's strikes, gaining exposure during the April 6, 2008 strike. It ran dense coverage of the strike and its ramifications and provided extensive coverage of cyberactivism and the blogosphere. It closed down a year later, however, due to financial difficulties, but was nonetheless and important with respect to amplification of blogs and certification of bloggers as citizen journalists (Newsreel 2009).

All three newspapers, *Al Masry Al Youm , Al Destor,* and the *Daily News Egypt,* for example, used banners and cartoons to talk about bloggers and give examples of campaigns. Blogger Gemyhood would design a cartoon for many of the strikes and the newspapers would use them as an example to discuss the campaigns, such as "We Refuse the new Constitution" (Gemyhood 2008). Incorporating such citizen journalism symbolically certified it as a part of the

[84] Blog post "The death of Deterrence" published on *Baheyya* 16 Sept. 2007 http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2007/09/death-of-deference.html

journalistic field and bestowed symbolic capital on those bloggers whose content was published. Many citizen journalists said they felt the media were not doing a sufficient job of covering the protests and actions in the streets. "I felt somebody should provide people with accurate information about what's going on in the streets" said Abbas, who emerged during that time as a leading blogger documenting the movement and pioneered citizen journalism in the country (Abbas 2008).

As blogs and citizen journalism increasingly became the sources and experts for Egypt's independent media, just as they had in other countries, journalists more routinely quoted them, wrote about them, and followed up on stories they broke. Election fraud, the push by judges for an independent judiciary, the rounding up of Sudanese refugees, ongoing labor strikes, the arrests of cyberactivists, the April 6 Movement, the El Baradei campaign, all were stories pushed by citizen journalists. Citizen journalism introduced interactive, virtual, public, two-way communication with the mainstream media, demonstrating the political power of new actors to influence how the establishment media functioned (Goldfarb 2006). This did not happen all at once, as Abbas noted, pointing out that there was "a huge difference in how blogs are perceived," between when he began blogging in 2004 and 2008 since by then "[m]any independent newspapers depend on them (blogs), and while at the beginning there was talk of competition for audiences between e-news and print, now there is convergence" (Al Malky 2007, 3). By 2010, most newspapers had started incorporating social media into their newsrooms and online platforms, and several citizen journalists were able to leverage their experience to obtain jobs directing these new digital platforms.

Explaining Certification Dynamics and Lag Time

One explanation for the lag time between international certification and domestic certification is that Egyptian journalists wanted to maintain their distinction by limiting entry to the journalistic field. At stake in political struggles, as Bourdieu observed, are the words and ideas through which the public constructs their understanding of reality and potentiality, and therefore media representations are a central site of contestation. The Egyptian press was where these battles took place.

Indeed, unlike democratic media systems where there is a high degree of conformity and uniformity in the news agenda that represents a general professional consensus, there was very little agreement on the news among Egypt's mainstream media. This created an opportunity for citizen journalists and the cyberactivist movement more broadly, as they constructed a political reality in which a different future, one without a Mubarak as president, could be imagined. As Cooper pointed out in his content analysis of coverage by the state-owned *Al Ahram,* the independent *Al Masry Al Youm* and the English-language *Daily News*, the editorial lines of the newspapers were strikingly different, reflecting a lack of agreement about what constituted local news as well as differing journalistic practices than their Western counterparts, which tend to publish mostly the same types of news (2008). He observed that anyone who read the three papers daily from 2005 to 2007 "would have been struck by the profound difference in what editors at each considered the most important domestic news…. (while) an alert daily reader of all three papers would have good reason to wonder if the editors were living in the same country" (Cooper 2008, 2). The papers rarely featured the same front-page story the same day. In fact, it only happened about one percent of the time among the three papers and no more than six

percent of the time in any two papers.[85] As a former journalist who worked in Egypt wrote, "[s]tate-owned national television channels had news bulletins, but in the sense of news value—stories covered and transmitted because of some intangible but intrinsic news value about which professionals are almost always in a rough consensus—there was no such thing" (Schleifer 2006). The lack of agreement on what constituted news, which events and people got coverage, and who qualified as a journalist created opportunities for cyberactivists and helps explain when and where particular mechanisms like amplification and certification would be more likely to be triggered. The lack of normative rules regarding news values also created opportunities for cyberactivists, and may have made it easier to exert an agenda-setting role. Citizen journalists were at the forefront of each of these symbolic struggles, which were critical to the rise and success of the youth driven cyberactivism social movement.

In contradistinction to technological determinists or critical political economic approaches, which attribute minimal, if any, agency to journalists, a field analysis reveals the hold that the mechanisms in the journalistic field have *first on journalists* and then, in part through them, on the political field and the field of power. The classification battles over who was or was not a journalist happened at the individual level before filtering up institutionally. Several of the media professionals I interviewed in 2006, and even in 2008, in the independent and state-run Egyptian media and the pan-Arab media dismissed the idea of bloggers as journalists or tried to diminish their role in Egypt's media ecology. By withholding certification they sought to differentiate bloggers and their practices and maintain the exclusivity of the journalistic field, and their position within it, while denying bloggers symbolic capital.

[85] This is in stark contrast to other media systems, such as the United States, where there are more often than not stories on similar subjects on the front page. In fact, each night the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* would send each other their front pages around 11 pm, and this author was responsible for ensuring that no major stories were missed.

Vested interests, professional occupational identities, generational gaps and the interest in maintaining the distinction and privilege of their professions made many journalists wary of certifying bloggers as any kind of journalist and thus allowing them access to the field and the symbolic capital they accrued as the intermediaries of public opinion formation. Deuze argues that a journalists' professional identity is enabled and enacted through the "occupational ideology" of the profession and their self-perceptions of themselves as journalists (2005). Citizen journalists challenged both the distinction of journalism as a profession as well as the occupational ideology upon which professional identity was constructed. By defining bloggers not as citizen journalists but as activists, liberals, youth, or just individuals, professional journalists attempted to deny bloggers access to the journalistic field and the symbolic power that field conveyed. This quote by an editor of a state-run newspaper at a 2006 conference on newspaper innovation is illustrative:

> Blogging is mainly for communication between people online, even if they don't know each other. But you can't depend on it for first-class users. Maybe it is a faster medium, but it is not the most reliable one. Especially the recent fuss concerning blogging and the sexual harassment incidents, which were proved exaggerated and unrealistic.[86] The best people to provide news are journalists.[87]

These strategies of distinction and classification sought to maintain the journalistic field as exclusive and professional and thus limit new entrants, especially those with the potential to disturb relations of power and privilege. The idea that anyone could be a journalist threatened to undermine the symbolic and cultural capital that accumulate to professional journalists in the mainstream media, particularly those who worked for outlets more closely related to the state.

[86] In fact, the incidents were not exaggerated and the blogs were credited with filling in where the mainstream media failed, as described in the section on the Eid el Fitr attacks.

[87] The author attended the conference sponsored by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and USAID to launch the Innovation in Newspapers World Report in Arabic in Cairo on April 22, 2008 at the Marriott Hotel. All descriptions and quotes are based on these notes.

Citizen journalists implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, challenged the professionalism of journalists working for state-owned media and thus represented an existential threat to the very identities of these individuals as journalists and thus their position in the journalistic field. Ultimately what was at stake was the construction of a new social epistemology in which designated professionals no longer had a monopoly on doing journalism and new agents sought to redefine the constitutive and regulative rules of the journalistic field. "The categories of perception, the schemata of classification, that is, essentially, the words, the names which construct social reality as much as the express it, are the stake par excellence of political struggle, which is a struggle to impose the legitimate principle of vision and division," as in the case of who was or was not a journalist (Bourdieu 1989, 20-21).

Such construction does not happen in a vacuum, it is most often a collective enterprise that is subjected to structural and cognitive constraints (Bourdieu 1989, 18). The Press Syndicate, for example, did not recognize bloggers as journalists and therefore they could not obtain press credentials. This was a structural constraint but one that depended on the legal power given to the syndicate to make such designations, which served to reinforce the power relations in the journalistic field. In general, the older generation of journalists had more significant cognitive constraints because their identities were wrapped up with their experience working for state-owned media within the parameters of the national-cultural paradigm and normative red-lines aimed at 'preserving' national culture and identity, which bloggers threatened (Venturelli 1998).

Plagiarism as a Form of Certification

The independent and mainstream media had a professionally ambiguous relationship with blogs, often reprinting content without permission and/or attribution. This was not unique to

blogs, however, as such duplication is not uncommon when it comes to reprinting stories originally published in Western news outlets, yet it went against the open source ethos of the blogosphere in which copyright was shunned in favor of sharing and reposting with attribution, often through the use of a Creative Commons license. When mainstream media used blog content or citizen journalism sources they legitimized those sources and certified it as a journalistically relevant practice, as discussed earlier.

The ethically dubious practice of reposting citizen journalism content without attribution had gotten so bad by 2006 Abbas had had enough. He posted a newspaper "blacklist" and a warning to those media outlets that would steal his work without attribution that he would pursue such copyright violations. The warning came amid a growing trend of mainstream media, including the leading newspapers, plagiarizing blog postings, both text and pictures, and failing to give credit. These included: *Nahar Egypt*, *Rose al-Youssef*, *Al Masry Al Youm*, and *El Fagr*.

Figure 6 Banner icons from Wael Abbas' Blacklist on Misr Digital.

Another case of plagiarism involved a judge and led to a series of legal actions, as detailed in Chapter Three. Although plagiarism was a somewhat convoluted form of certification, it was a double-edged sword for those who engaged in it because search algorithms and the networked logic of online content made it so easy to document and publicize plagiarism. Blogs and social media networks gave bloggers the chance to decertify media outlets and others who would use their content without attribution. This in turn strengthened the norm of attribution within the journalistic field and the blogosphere.

Structural Advantages and Disadvantages of Citizen Journalism

Social media technologies made an activist strategy of citizen journalism possible because of the structural advantage they provided. Facile production, instantaneous transmission, diverse coverage of topics not typically 'allowed' by the gatekeepers in traditional media, and individual rather than corporate 'ownership' made it difficult for the state to exert pressure economically on citizen journalists. Resorting to coercion or repression, such as imprisonment or violence, carried high costs because of the negative attention it generated. According to Flew, there were three elements critical to the rise of citizen journalism globally: open publishing, collaborative editing and distributed content (2005). In addition to those elements I would add the decreasing cost of technology and Internet access that enabled these elements to become widely accessibly, as analyzed in Chapter Three. Open publishing means that citizen journalists were not subject to the same editorial controls or filters nor economic dynamics of ownership and influence as professional journalists since they were essentially volunteers who self-publish via online media and social networking platforms, although this had its own drawbacks as I

discuss below. Unencumbered by the constraints of professional journalism, grassroots citizen journalists covered topics like torture, human rights, and presidential succession that were largely absent from the mainstream Egyptian media.

Citizen journalists act as both information senders and receivers and are inherently more dialogical than traditional media because of the comments functions, trackback and social bookmarking tools that are integrated in social media platforms (Domingo and Heinonen 2008).[88] They were also far more advanced at using web-based tools and digital media to connect with and build their audience. Many of the posts on the leading citizen journalist sites had upwards of 20-30 comments, and as Negm noted in an interview, "anything that's challenging the social, political or religious taboos gets you many comments." Professional journalists, situated as they were in the state-dominated media system, were far less likely to challenge these taboos and mainstream media lacked participatory mechanisms at that time. Twitter feeds similarly enable greater engagement by replying to individual tweets, following a particular user and re-tweeting particular posts.

Wael Abbas, for example, began using Twitter in 2007, setting up a feed for his blog and experimenting with SMS messaging. No Egyptian newspapers were using such technologies at the time, yet in October 2007 he claimed more than 1200 subscribers, making him one of the most followed people on Twitter at the time. By the end of 2010 he had tens of thousands of followers. Malek Mustafa was another early adopter of Twitter, joining in September 2006 because, as he put it in a 2008 interview, the microblog service made updates and communication "easy." Citizen journalists used social media to create feedback loops between

[88] Trackback tools allow users to comment on the original post with a link to their weblog, while social bookmarking tools like Digg, del.icio.us.com, Facebook, reddit and Google, to name a few allow users to share and repost links they like

their blogs, Twitter account, Flikr posts and YouTube uploads, noting that "if you collect everything in the same place it's easier for visitor to follow, otherwise it's confusing" (Gemyhood 2008). These feedback loops were also an amplification mechanism. Hamalawy's Flikr Photostream provided one of the most comprehensive photo archives of Egyptian pro-democracy and labor strikes over the past decade.[89]

Videos, in particular, are powerful forms products of citizen journalism, since they can be used by broadcast and satellite television stations in their reporting. YouTube was among the top three most visited sites in Egypt during the period of study according to several trackers. Yet I observed that even as of 2008, for example, there were virtually no Egyptian newspapers that posted original or new content on their websites, rather the sites just replicated the print version. "I find that any journalist who wants to be better needs to learn more technology needs to learn how to interact with Internet and blogging," said one editor at a 2008 media development conference in Cairo.[90]

Citizen journalists also enjoyed more immediacy than journalists who published or broadcast in traditional media, and were more likely to provide incremental updates on their blogs or via Twitter or Facebook to a developing story. Egyptian journalists had not yet incorporated these into their newsmaking practices during the period of study, although they are increasingly doing so. The integration of alternative media with mobile phones enabled instantaneous reporting and transmission, even without access to a computer or the Internet, and thus gained access to amplification mechanisms. These unedited, free, instantaneous platforms

[89] http://www.flickr.com/photos/elhamalawy/collections/72157625085049872/

[90] The author attended the conference sponsored by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and USAID to launch the Innovation in Newspapers World Report in Arabic in Cairo on April 22, 2008 at the Marriott Hotel. All descriptions and quotes are based on her notes.

challenge the ability of the state to control the information environment and forces mainstream journalists to compete with bloggers to write the "first version of history" (Domingo and Heinonen 2008; Koskinen 2007; Lowrey 2006; Radsch 2007a).

Journalists also recognized the structural advantages of blogs: because citizen journalists worked online and without the institutional constraints of the mainstream media, such as editorial hierarchies and normative "professional" constraints, they could potentially publish what professional journalists could or would not. Bloggers told me how professional journalists and media outlets would use blogs to circumvent professional norms that would have prevented publication, such as a lack of independently verifiable evidence to support a specific story. For example, bloggers reported that journalists who worked for newspapers had approached them with controversial stories that lacked documented evidence, or asked that they discuss a particular topic on their blogs in order to generate a debate on which they could then report. "They want us to talk about it as a topic of discussion, not as a story," one blogger explained, "because they don't want to get in trouble - if they claim that they are the ones that discovered this story then they will have to provide evidence and be asked questions." Others claimed that journalists resorted to blogging in order to provide a source to which they could refer in their article, attributing the report to the blog rather than to themselves. Such self-referentialism contradicts most conceptions of journalistic ethics and acceptable practices, but also demonstrates the ingenuity of journalists working in a repressive society, without access to information and with criminal defamation laws that applied to traditional but not online media. As another blogger recounted, a blog post in the aftermath of the April 6, 2008 strike "mentioned very casually that two people had died during the riot in Mahalla," which was untrue and unconfirmed. "I mean if I'm blogging and someone calls me up and says someone was killed, do

I just publish that? What was doubly shocking was that two mainstream newspapers, the *Daily News Egypt* and *Al Destor*, both used the blog entry to say that such and such happened" (Atia 2008).

But just because they *could* publish more easily, and theoretically without the ethical constraints professional journalists felt, many citizen journalist bloggers *would* not, "I personally don't do that," said Abbas, referring to publishing undocumented reports. "I prefer stories that are supported with photos and videos and documents and audio and stuff like that" (Abbas 2008). Indeed reputation and credibility were just as important in the blogosphere as in the journalistic field, and without the institutional resources that professionals had at their disposal.

Economics of Blogging and Citizen Journalism

The logic of competition, however, also created uneven structural disadvantages for bloggers with respect to economic factors. Few bloggers made money from their blogs or received payment for blogging. Indeed, such economic gain explicitly contrasted with the logic of the blogosphere during the period of study. Several bloggers expressed the sentiment that if a blogger if received payment it would contradict the reason and spirit of blogging. "I think once you do that (accept money) you are not independent," explained Sherif Ahmed in an interview. In many cases journalists used their content or media outlets republished their commentary, but in no cases that I came across did anyone receive payment for the use of their content. Some bloggers were able to parlay their experience doing citizen journalism into paid opportunities with mainstream media outlets. These tended to be with Western outlets, since salaries were so

low in the Egyptian press, and the Arab media more generally, that even journalists were often not paid or paid just a few dollars per article.[91]

Several Egyptian bloggers were able to get jobs as fixers for foreign press, and some citizen journalists even wrote pieces for the Western press, particularly during times of crisis. They were few but shared certain characteristics, such as being bilingual, highly educated, and familiar with the regulative rules of the global journalistic field. These bloggers were able to parlay the journalistic capital they garnered through blogging into positions with Western papers. Despite the ethnocentrism of the US liberal model, Egyptian bloggers recognized its hegemonic status as the ideal in mainstream contemporary conceptions of professional journalism (Esser and Pfetsch 2004). They understood they had to refrain from opinionated blogging and adhere to the rules of the field, "weighing things more" and avoiding the appearance of bias. "Bye-bye activism and bye-bye opinion writing," said Younis (2008).

But decisions by editorial staff not to cover certain events could also be frustrating; such as when Nora did a report for her blog on bread strikes in December 2007 after the foreign desk did not think it warranted coverage. She said the same thing happened on April 6, 2008 with the General Strike that I discuss in detail in the following chapter. Nora Younis was among the more elite examples, having worked for the *Washington Post*. She said felt that working for an agenda-setting elite paper was so influential in Egypt that it was worth giving up her blogging for. "The (Egyptian) government cared what that *Washington Post* wrote because they would call about it," she said. So I compromised a bit so decided to put effort on what could influence. I'm not blogging anymore, I feel very much that I want to move and do things," she told me in 2008, shortly after the April 6 strike. Less than three years after the *Post* initially passed on Nora's

[91] After the period of study, however, some of them ended up with paid staff positions in the social media departments of Egyptian media outlets, but these did not exist during the period under study

coverage of the first ever Facebook strike, the oft-labeled "Facebook Revolution" helped lead to the downfall of President Hosni Mubarak and she went on to become the online editor for the English version of *Al Masry Al Youm*.

The time factor was another economical issue since blogging required trade offs. Many bloggers were students and in university, which meant that they had to divide their time between studying, classes, family obligations, and blogging. Since blogging was often equated with journalism, and journalism was not a well-respected field, many bloggers said their parents would not allow them to study journalism or become a journalist, so blogging would often be put on the backburner during intense academic periods. Thus I heard from dozens of bloggers that they and their friends stopped or reduced blogging during exam time. "Bloggers stop because of exams, so it lightens up during this time, not entirely, but somewhat," explained one blogger (Badr 2008). Another blogger said: "I just started to blog. I used to write on Facebook but then my friends told me I should have a blog. But I'm very busy now because of exams and having class from 9am to 6pm" (Zakaria 2008). Since blogging was an extracurricular activity, it was often put to the side during busy times, although the blog itself remained and many turned to Twitter and Facebook to post shorter notes and reserved their blogs for more occasional but thoughtful engagement on a given topic.

As blogging and citizen journalism became more widespread towards the latter part of the decade, NGOs began to view cyberactivism and citizen journalism as relevant to democracy promotion and human rights activities and the opportunities for these youth to receive training expanded. I was approached by several foreign governments interested in "building the capacity" of Egyptian bloggers while I was in the field in 2008, and by 2010 there was a clear emphasis on citizen journalism in media development and freedom of expression funding and programming

(Myers 2009; Nelson 2011; Yacoubian 2011). Thus throughout the post-millennial decade the opportunities for training and capacity building increased, putting bloggers at less of a skills disadvantage with their professional counterparts.

Language Choices & a New Vocabulary for Dissent

Language choice was a key factor in the dynamics of dissemination, amplification and transnational cyberactivism, and a strategic choice that related to a blogger's offline identity, conception of their audience, and objective of blogging. But language choice also affected a blogger or cyberactivist's ability to trigger the reinforcing mechanisms of technological certification, technological amplification and agenda-setting. Bloggers who posted in English had a distinct advantage in the networked global blogosphere if reaching out to transnational media and activist networks was their goal because English was the predominant language online (UNESCO 2009). The interrelated concepts of technological amplification and technological certification help explain how the inherent characteristics of the platform favored those blogging in English, since Arabic were less likely to be able to trigger those mechanisms and thus extend the reach of their blogs. Furthermore, it also accounts for why so few Muslim Brotherhood bloggers figured among the internationally renowned bloggers or received the certification and symbolic capital that came along with citizen journalism prizes.

Those who wrote in English did so in part to speak to a broader audience around the world and engage with human rights groups and the media. But they also wrote in English because of the socioeconomic positions they occupied in the 'real' world. They used English because they could often time pursue agenda-setting and framing in the international media with

greater success than if they blogged in Arabic. As the Muslim Brotherhood's leading blogger pointed out, referring to a leading international human rights organization, "Amnesty reads English language blogs" not Arabic ones (Mahmoud 2008). Indeed most of the transnational human rights or journalist protection organizations lacked Arabic-speaking staff so they depended to a large extent on English blogs for their window into Egypt's digital activist sphere. "English language blogs are more influential than Arabic, and the circle of English blogs is larger," explained another Muslim Brotherhood blogger who was among those who wrote in Arabic. His statement implicitly equates influence with media amplification, namely in the English-language Western media. Several bloggers reflected a general consensus that the people who wrote in English were communicating with an audience in the West, competing with Mubarak's regime to frame events in Egypt for that audience (Farag 2008, Younis, 2008). "The people who write in Arabic are speaking to an Egyptian audience, they are mobilizing the people, and they are building public knowledge. And the people who are writing in English are talking to the West so the reporters come and talk to them because it's easy, just pick up the phone" explained Younis in an interview. The same trend could be found among the social networking platforms, Twitter feeds, and Facebook groups and updates that developed later.

Some of the bloggers interviewed said they had difficulty expressing themselves in their native tongue, especially those educated in English or American schools or universities where their major was predominantly taught in English. These bloggers could be categorized as upper middle class, owned their own computers and had individual Internet connections at home. Others said they wrote in English on topics like human rights and democracy since their feeling was that Arabic lacked the vocabulary to discuss these subjects or their dominant articulation was in English. Their posts were directed internally at a personal audience of friends and

externally to a Western, English speaking audience. Among the Core English language bloggers from this first generation were the Arabist bloggers (Hossam, Issandr, Eman),[92] Sandmonkey,[93] the Big Pharaoh,[94] Baheyya,[95] and Nermeena.[96]

Beyond Normal,[97] Digressing[98] and the Gharbeia brothers, Amr[99] and Ahmad,[100] were among the first Egyptian bloggers to write in Arabic. Unlike their English-language compatriots the Arabic bloggers were speaking primarily to an Egyptian audience and attempting to enhance the technology available for writing in Arabic on the Internet. These bloggers often said they wrote in Arabic because it was their mother tongue and they were more conformable writing in Arabic than in English (particular on 'vulgar' subjects), but also because they want to talk to their fellow citizens. Furthermore, Ahmad said that if he were to write in English his posts would just be one more voice in a cacophony and thus "wouldn't matter" the way they do in Arabic. Others said they wrote in Arabic because they "don't care about foreigners" (Gemyhood 2008) or were specifically writing to their fellow Egyptians (al-Omran 2008, Farag 2008, Gharbeia 2008a). "In Arabic people are trying to come up with a new discourse" and create content in

[92] http://www.arabist.net

[93] http://www.sandmonkey.org/

[94] http://www.bigpharaoh.com/

[95] http://baheyya.blogspot.com/

[96] http://nerro.wordpress.com/

[97] http://beyondnormal.blogspot.com/

[98] http://digressing.blogspot.com

[99] http://gharbeia.net/

[100] http://zamakan.gharbeia.org/

Arabic on a range of topics – like climate change or nuclear power – that does not really exist in Arabic, explained Ahmad Gharbeia.

Ahmad, who started blogging in November 2003, created the Wikipedia entry in Arabic for blog (*moudawana* مدوّنة), describing what it was, how to set one up and promoting the use of this particular Arabic word as the Arabic translation of the English word 'blog' (Gharbeia 2008a; Nermeena 2008). This proactive attempt to provide the linguistic resources to engage in new discussions on new topics represented a novel application of ijma', since Wikipedia is a user-generated crowd-sourced encyclopedia that depends on consensus. It also represented a new form of agenda-setting in that it controlled the very words and terms that are used to discuss a particular topic, and how that term is contextualized within the broader linguistic referents. As noted earlier, the root of the term *moudawana* refers to the term code in Arabic, as in a legal or civil code, while the root can also mean chronicle. Other terminology floating around in the early days of blogging hearkened to the verbal root نَشَرَ which contains the meaning of publish, and كَتَبَ which signifies writing or book. The word *moudawana*, therefore, implicitly links the term to a meaning that includes the idea of a code as in a way of doing things as well as a chronology.

Other bloggers regularly posted in both languages, and their language choice for particular posts reveal who the intended recipients of a particular message or communication was and what mechanism was being enacted in a given strategy. One of the most prolific and well-known bloggers in Egypt was Alaa Abdel Fattah, who blogged at Manalaa.net with his wife, Manal Hassan. Alaa was a so-called Linux geek, whose father Ahmad Seif El Islam Hamad was executive director of the Hisham Mubarak Law Center, an organization devoted to defending human rights activists and often targeted by the Mubarak regime. Alaa and Manal, 'Egypt's First Blogger Couple', posted a wide range of personal, technical and activist content on their blog.

They also founded the Egyptian Blogs Aggregator,[101] but refused to commit themselves to one language or the other and posted in both languages since the beginning. Many other bloggers such as Abbas, Younis and Hamalawy posted primarily in Arabic but also in English when they specifically wanted to reach a broader Western audience.

Thus from the very beginning there were both Arabic and English blogs, but the latter were statistically overrepresented in coverage by the global mainstream media and cyberactivists, which helps explain why certain strategies of resistance and networks emerged. Other bloggers and cyberactivists took a very pragmatic view of language choice in a world in which less than 1 percent of Internet content is in Arabic and English dominates as the default language on most of the most important social media platforms of the past several years. Language choice therefore could have significant consequences, as when videos that appeared violent and had descriptions only in Arabic were removed from YouTube or Facebook groups devoted to a particular leader or cause were blocked because corporate administrators did not understand their point. This occurred in the case of Wael Abbas, whose YouTube and Yahoo accounts were suspended for violation of terms of service due to violent videos of police brutality he posted. Although his account was restored following intervention by the U.S. government, which contacted Google, he lost all of the content he had previously posted to the video sharing site (Abbas 2008). As one cyberactivist explained:

> If you have an Arabic video and you write a description in Arabic, and I am normal viewer watching a video and discover it's violent and I didn't know because I'm foreign and I don't speak Arabic, then I don't know that violence came from the Egyptian regime against civilians, and that the video is being used to publicize human rights abuses. So I will flag it as hate speech. When a video is flagged enough times, it is marked as a hate video and they (YouTube) will suspend and delete an account… It's Wael's fault because he wrote the descriptions in Arabic and I told him not to. They (Google) are starting a

[101] http://www.omraneya.net/

> human rights channel. I think when they called Wael, they told him about this. (Gemyhood 2008)

Many of these early Core bloggers were made famous by the media during the activist phase, and several continued to blog and remained among the most influential, read and commented on of their cyberactivist peers. Many were among the most followed, tweeted and interviewed activists during the 2011 uprising, including Alaa and Manal, Abbas, Ramy Raouf, Malek Mustafa, Younis, and others. Indeed, blogging had become a way to garner fame (if not fortune), and the role of the media in amplification and certification of these cyberactivists as speaking for their generation strengthened their role as key nodes in the networked public sphere and contributed to the development the youth movement. Yet they were not its leaders. Indeed there were no leaders, there were just bloggers and citizen journalists to whom others looked up and sought advice, training and links from.

Conclusion: Citizen Journalism as Cyberactivism

It is through the writing of history that citizen journalism becomes not only a distinctive form of journalism, but also a form of political activism, particularly in repressive countries where the circulation of information is inherently subversive. While this chapter contributes to addressing all four research questions, it particularly focused on answering the fourth question: does citizen journalism alter the dynamics of authoritarian media systems and how. It argues that citizen journalism generated pockets of resistance in the dialogue it created around previous off-limit topics while simultaneously undermining the hegemony of the state by chipping away at its control over the mediated public sphere. The rise of citizen journalism as a form of cyberactivism builds on a long history of subversive media, from the *Samizdat,* cassette tapes

and posters of the past, but of an unparalleled scope in terms of the instantaneity and reach of digital media content. Citizen journalism has become the distinguishing form of political activism in authoritarian and undemocratic societies in the post-millennial era. In these regimes citizen journalism, in the form of blogging and social networking, has become central to contemporary contentious politics and represents a most potent form of political contestation.

There is likely a window of time in which this dynamic will be so potent as the novelty wears off and the boundaries between the professional and amateur journalist recede and mainstream media adopt and co-opt citizen journalism. This was not the case during the period of study, however. The contours of the information society in the new millennium made citizen journalism one of the most potent and politically charged manifestations of power in societies where citizens lack access to the political field and state interests dominated the media sphere. Citizen journalism is as much a response to restricted venues for participation in the public sphere as it is a way to present an alternative version of "the truth" propagated by the mainstream media, which in Egypt was of course dominated by the state. Thus blogs and social media, when used as citizen journalism platforms, contributed to diminishing the hegemony of the state and undermining its control over the media system and thus its ability to control what goes into the minds of people (Gramsci 1992).

The sequencing of amplification and certification mechanisms explain the dynamics of successful framing contests, and highlights how Egyptian cyberactivists leveraged the power of transnational activist and media networks as part of this process. This in turn enabled bloggers to invoked the symbolic power of those agents and thus generate their own political and symbolic capital. Translation of Arabic posts into English made amplification in the global media more likely. Amplification by mainstream media could both amplify and certify the blogs or incidents

to which they referred, and in doing so would activate technological amplification and certification. Because media outlets tend to be relatively well-connected and influential in social media networks and search algorithms, particularly elite global media, when they hyperlink to blogs or quote bloggers they trigger technological amplification by increasing the authority of that content or term in the network algorithms. Mainstream media content has remained among the most linked-to content online, and thus amplification of blogs through the media make it more likely that those beyond the blogosphere would interact with and share that content. Concurrently, the ability to share and re-circulate those links triggered technological certification, increasing the ranking of a given piece of content or link in search results or algorithmic personalized suggestions. The act of liking or sharing content also generated a numerical indication that showed how many other people had shared that link, and thus indicated how many others had amplified that content through their networks and thus certified it as something worth sharing. Thus the numbers of 'shares' on Facebook, trackbacks on blogs, or tweets, were an indication of the level of amplification and certification. They also established the authority of a given user as the algorithms of search and popularity recognized and logged those with the most interactions and in turn propelled them higher in search rankings or recommendations.

The concept of the journalistic field, and role of powerful actors in that field to enact certification mechanisms, elucidates how certification of bloggers as "journalists" and the impact this had on the statist Egyptian media system and politics, had less to do with phenomenological lifeworlds and more to do with network ties of recognition. The same can be said for the distinction that comes with winning awards, being quoted in the media, etc. This distinction reinforced the potentiality of young Egyptians and their perception of themselves as having an

impact. But efficacy of activism depends not only on the actions of those activists but also on the support, recognition or certification of outside actors. This explain why these new networked media were such a crucial part of the story, because they facilitated network ties of recognition, certification, and amplification on a scale not possible before. Indeed, surveys showed that Twitterers were especially likely to connect with media, perhaps explaining the fact that most users tweeted in English even though the Arabic platform was available in 2009. A 2009 survey found that nearly 60 percent of respondents said they interact most often with media and journalists, coming in just after friends at 70 percent (Malin 2010b). By 2010, nine percent of MENA internet users said in a survey that they used Twitter, with Egyptians most strongly represented (Malin 2010a).

Just as the telegraph of the 1830s, radio in the 1920s and television in the 1950s transformed the way people got information and the definition of news itself, the digital revolution of the 2000s transformed both the nature of news and relations of power. Citizen journalism alters not only how news is created and public perception influenced, but also the very political logic of authoritarian systems predicated on control of information and a monopoly on the means of symbolic power. The next chapter describes how citizen journalism and other repertoires of contentious cyberactivism contributed to the development of a new social movement that grew out of and through blogging and social networking, but was indelibly inflected by the political context in which it began and the responses by the regime.

CHAPTER V

CYBERACTIVISM AND THE YOUTH MOVEMENT

"We use Facebook to schedule our protests, Twitter to coordinate and YouTube to tell the world" – a popular tweet

"You have to connect people and connect the revolution of freedom with the revolution of bread" – April 6 Movement Facebook Post

Blogging and cyberactivism preceded the development of the youth movement, and it was the solidarity and normative commitments of the early Egyptian blogosphere helped create the youth movement that became a defining political movement in post-millennial Egypt. The blogging movement in Egypt was significant because it was a case where young activists developed new contentious repertoires and new forms of collective action, including blogging, citizen journalism, and social media networks, to bring about political change. Indeed the cyberactivist youth movement in Egypt supports Thomas' contention that the "real" is made up in part by the semiotic flow "between the 'online' and the 'offline" and therefore there is no "striking dichotomy" between them (Thomas 2006, 1).

Although the blogosphere was a diverse array of personal diaries, journalistic accounts, rants and raves and opinion, some blogs were particularly concerned with politics, and seek to report, document, and challenge both the institutional media and the government. Cyberactivists engaged in political organization, fundraising, and ideological articulation and were increasingly perceived as political actors by the state. They were also adept at integrating the dominant modalities of communication and leveraging their distinctive qualities in creative and unexpected ways, and in doing so managed to stay ahead of the Mubarak regime.

This chapter analyses the key factors that contributed to the development of cyberactivism into a social movement during the period study and how particular mechanisms combined to produce particular outcomes. It begins by analyzing the dynamics of diffusion and introducing some of the early adopters and Core bloggers. It then goes on to analyze how the symbiosis between the emergence of a new political movement called Kefaya in 2004/2005 and the blogosphere created an opportunity structure that propelled the emerging youth movement into a realm of contention. It then proceeds to analyze how regime responses to the blogosphere and cyberactivism did the same, and how cyberactivists used the issues of arrests and torture to propel the movement and resist the barrier of fear created over the decades of Mubarak's rule. This leads into an analysis of the April 6, 2008 Facebook strike and the role it played in inspiring and solidifying the youth movement despite the regime's violence and harassment against them. Finally it concludes with a discussion of other dynamics at play in the development of the blogosphere as a realm of contention that gave rise to the Egyptian youth movement.

Early Adopters and Key Innovators

Egypt's initial bloggers comprised early adopters who were influential in spreading blogging among their friends, encouraging them to start blogs and empowering them with the skills to do so, and among strangers. "They contact us, send us emails to ask us about blogging, how to start blogging, and we answer," explained one Core blogger (Mustafa 2008). The Core played a key role in facilitating the diffusion of blogs and creating the Egyptian blogosphere. They literally taught others how to create and use blogs, actively helping anyone who asked, and many who did not, start a blog. Many times those people were prolific email users, or

participated in online forums, and a core blogger would tell them about blogs as a better alternative. Rami Karam, for example, described a typical situation by which he and other early adopters became bloggers:

> So yeah, a friend told me 'all these emails you are sending us' – because I was in the US, sending a weekly update of what I was doing – he said, 'the perfect thing to do it is to start this new technology called a blog. From one site, you can publish anything you want, and you don't spam our mailboxes. And it doesn't force us to read your stuff' (as email does)… So he was probably the first Egyptian blogger. His name is Ramzi. This is the first one I know of who had an account on blogger. (Karam 2008)

The case of Egypt underscores the fact, observed by Wilson, that such diffusion does not occur in a concentric circular pattern from richer industrial Western countries outwards to developing world and the South. As Wilson also notes, ICTs have limited effects on most people but are centrally important to a small national elite who support developing knowledge culture and innovation to support wider diffusion of the information revolution (Wilson 2004). Core bloggers were overwhelmingly committed to freedom of expression and the belief that the more people who use ICTs like blogs the better, a belief they put into practice since the beginning and which continued to be a common theme throughout the rest of the decade. They amplified the normal rate of diffusion because they were highly connected nodes in the network and because their activities and arrests resulted in coverage by the mainstream media, inspiring others to join the blogosphere. "Most people online (blogging) are idealists, even spiritual – even if they are atheists – the have feelings, are creative," explained a blogger who started blogging in 2004 (Ahmed 2008).

The Gharbeia brothers, Hossam el-Hamalawy,[102] Ramy of Beyond Normal,[103] Mohammed of Digressing,[104] Manal and Alaa,[105] Sherif Ahmed,[106] Sandmonkey,[107] Malek

[102] http://arabist.net/arabawy/

Mustafa, Ahmed Naje and others encouraged members of their social networks – both physical and virtual - to create blogs. Manal and Alaa in particular were considered the blogosphere's godparents.[108] These early adopters were also among the first to use Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Flikr, but in a way not originally conceived of by the creators of such applications.[109] Interviews with bloggers and journalists in 2006 and 2008 revealed that as information source proliferated they had to be selective in what they read, and the Core bloggers figured most prominently on everyone's reading list. Wael Abbas' *Misr Digital*, Beheyya, Nora Younis, Hossam el-Hamalawy's *Arabawy*, Abdel Monem Mahmoud's *Ana Ikhwan* and Sandmonkey were among the most regularly read by both journalists and bloggers. RSS feeds, which enable people to follow updates by automatically aggregating new content from chosen sources, helped expand the influence of some of the less famous blogs by making the new content rather than forcing the users to check themselves.

A blogger who wrote his own history of the Egyptian blogosphere – which he similarly distinguished as a space distinct and discernible from other blogospheres – three years on, described how he and his friend randomly stumbled upon blogs, the importance of particular blogs, and the typical characteristics of these early bloggers:

> I found Manal and Alaa's Bit Bucket, which was a Blog Aggregator created by two married Linux and Programming Gurus. As you can see, at that part of the

[103] http://beyondnormal.blogspot.com

[104] http://digressing.blogspot.com/

[105] http://www.manalaa.net

[106] http://justice4every1.blogspot.com/

[107] http://www.sandmonkey.org

[108] http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/10/24/egypt-blogospheres-godparents-going-south/

[109] These applications did not gain popularity until the third phase

> Egyptian blogosphere history, many blogs were into computers and IT, such as JPierre and Mohamed Sameer's FooLab. And even now, when there is diversity in blogs topics, away from the technical ones, you can still notice that many of today's bloggers are Engineers.[110]

Unpacking the statement above reveals several mechanisms at play in the development of the Egyptian blogosphere and underscores how the inherent properties of networked information communication technology played a role in the expansion of the blogosphere and the influence of early adopters. The blog aggregator, for example, was provided a minimal level of certification by identifying which blogs were considered part of the Egyptian blogosphere.[111] It was also the first and only Egyptian blog aggregator that did not discriminate inclusion based on the content of the blog or the identity of the blogger, so that even ideologically adverse or atheistic content was included. This choice emphasized free speech, inclusiveness and diversity as values of the Egyptian blogosphere and was respected by many bloggers who specifically mentioned the uniqueness of Omraneya as compared to the Jordanian blogging service Maktoob, which reportedly was not as inclusive.

Kefaya: Symbiosis with Young Bloggers and Embodied Activism

The adoption of new ICTs like blogging and mobile Internet by Egyptian youth coincided with the rise of a new political movement, Kefaya, and thus provided both inspiration and outlet for youth activism that bridged the online/offline divide early on. The median age in Egypt was 24, and state-subsidized higher education meant that many of these youth were highly educated and technologically savvy, but faced economically frustrating conditions including high

[110] http://notgr33ndata.blogspot.com/2008/02/three-years-blogging.html

[111] I user the term minimal because the aggregator included blogs by U.S.-based pundits and observers not located in Egypt as well as my own blog.

unemployment (hovering between 23 and 30 percent) and a corrupt patronage system (*Global employment trends* 2008). These youth make up the majority of Internet and social media users at that time,[112] and Kefaya laid the seeds for the youth movement, forging space in the streets for public protests.

The new political movement Kefaya grew out of the massive anti-Iraq war protests in 2003 and 2004 and made street protests part of its repertoire of contention as it sought political change at the very top. The Egyptian Movement for Change (*al-Haraka al-Misriyya min al-Taghyir*), or *Kefaya* as it was commonly referred to, represented a watershed in modern domestic politics and helped create new political opportunity structures that bloggers poised themselves to take advantage of as well as on-the-ground training for youth activists to develop social mobilization skills. The convergence of new media and activism propelled the Kefaya movement and the expansion of the blogosphere into a realm of political contestation. These opportunity structures became opportunity spirals between late 2004 to late 2006 as several key environmental changes converged and new interpreters emerged who took advantage of this convergence. These environmental changes included the rise of Kefaya, the continued expansion of ICT use and blogging, and the U.S. democracy promotion efforts I discussed in Chapter Three. As McAdam et al note, "[o]pportunity spirals operate through sequences of environmental change, interpretation of that change, action, and counteraction, repeated as one action alters another actor's environment" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 243). Kefaya emerged at a critical juncture in the development of the blogosphere, which was expanding rapidly beyond the Core group of early adopters.

[112] Although by 2011, users age 40 and became the fastest growing segment of Facebook users in Egypt.

There was a natural affinity between the normative commitments of a non-hierarchical, cross-ideational movement that sought to open up new forms of debate and contestation and independent bloggers committed to freedom of expression and participation in the public sphere through unfiltered, unmediated blogging platforms. Kefaya provided them with a collective action frame that resonated with many of them and opportunities to bond with each other offline by participating in protests.

Although Kefaya represented more of an explicit effort to build a movement than blogging did, activists in both movements shared many similarities in terms of supporting a cross-ideational ethos and the role that regime repression, particularly arrests and imprisonment, played in building asabiyah and collective action frames. In 1981, for example, president Sadat rounded up activists from across the political spectrum, including many of Kefaya's founders, and threw them into prison. According to Shorbagy, the experiences and connections made in prison laid the groundwork for cross ideological dialogue, though it was not until the mid 1990s that concerted efforts at institutionalizing their ideas would be made (2007, 43). There were a series of attempts by these activists at fostering dialogue in the early nineties, including a 1993 conference organized by a prominent MB and a Leftist activist, a 1994 National Dialogue among professional organizations and a 1996 Democracy dialogue, so that by end of 1990s the joint-action Committee on Supporting the Palestinian Intifada was created in an attempt to work together politically on issues of consensus, like foreign policy (Shorbagy 2007).

Kefaya was the brainchild of the 1970s activist generation and was the first successful effort in modern Egyptian history at building a political movement based on collaboration across ideological lines (Shorbagy 2007, 40). It was conceived during a Ramadan *iftar*[113] of Abdul Ela

[113] An iftar is the meal that breaks the sun-up to sun-down Muslim fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

Mady, leader of the Islamist al-Wassat party, in November 2003 with 23 leading activists, including members from across the political spectrum. They represented al-Karama, Nasserists, communists, the banned Labour party and leading figures George Ishaq, Ahmed Bahaa din Shaaban, *al-Arabi* editor Abdel Halim Qandil and activist Muhammed Sayyed Said. These ideologically diverse activists included many who were active in the 1970s student movement, which ended up fracturing along ideological lines by the late 1970s when Islamists displaced the Leftists as the primary mobilizing force of the movement following sweeping successes in student union elections (Shorbagy 2007).

The iftar participants decided to start a movement for change by naming six from their ranks to write a statement that would be circulated to Egypt's leading public figures and elite for endorsement. Efforts to draft a statement that could unite diverse groups was an example of ijma', consensus building, through which asabiyah emerged. Eight months later it had garnered 300 signatures and the Egyptian Movement for Change was launched in September 2004. It included the 20 March Movement, Islamists groups including the Muslim Brotherhood offshoot al-Wassat (The Middle) party, the banned Communist Party and the al-Karama party founded by break off Nasserists. It also included human rights organizations like the Hisham Mubarak Law Center (HMLC), which became a key defender of bloggers and freedom of expression. This marked the emergence of a new kind of politics based on collaboration across ideological lines. Groups from across the political and religious spectrum banded together under the slogan *la lil-tawrith, la lil-tamdid* (no to inheritance, no to extension). The Egyptian Movement for Change soon came to be known by its one word slogan: *kefaya*. Enough.

With it's simple slogan "enough" their call for change rung true with many factions of the Egyptian public: those who lacked economic opportunity, political opportunity, freedom of

religion and of course those who had had enough of emergency rule and undemocratic elections. As Shorbagy explains, "To these actors, political freedoms have become the key to effective resistance to the occupation of both Palestine and Iraq. The stage was set for the emergence of a new movement that encapsulated the emerging consensus and illustrated the new possibilities it revealed" (Shorbagy 2007, 45). In particular, Kefaya successful mobilization of collective action revitalized street protests as a form of political speech and used tactics of civil disobedience that had been unheard of as a viable form of political contestation.

Kefaya's manifesto called for civil disobedience and sought to break taboos and establish a right to demonstrate and talk about the country frankly (Ishaq 2006) This collective action frame was an assertion of the right to freedom of expression that made Kefaya and Egypt's young bloggers natural allies, and both groups sought not only to obtain this right but to practice it in their interactions and confrontations with the regime. As one of Egypt's most respected bloggers, and on of its few truly anonymous ones, wrote on her blog: "In 1999, civil disobedience was laughable and shunned, completely outside the accepted script of remonstrating with elites."[114] Another leader aptly observed that "Kifaya *(sic)* stretched that concept of operating outside but not against the law… constituting a de facto situation which all the new groups for change are now operating under" (Howeidy 2005b).

Kefaya first appeared on the protest scene in December 2004 when hundreds of people, including several Core bloggers, held a silent protest, their mouths taped with yellow stickers reading '*Kefaya'*, at Cairo's High Court to demand that President Mubarak step down and hold direct, competitive elections. They rallied against the president running for a fifth term in office or installing his son Gamal in the presidency. This was the first-ever explicitly anti-Mubarak

[114] http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2005_04_01_archive.html

demonstration and marked a shift in domestic protest politics by uniting disparate groups under the same umbrella and seeking to build solidarity, and even asabiyah, that would inspire people to take to the streets in protest. According to one citizen journalist blogger's account, "As far as I know, this is the first demonstration specifically against Mubarak that has *ever* been held. People did shout anti-Mubarak slogans during the Iraq war or pro-Palestinian protests, but they were never about that issue."[115]

But it was President Mubarak himself who created an opportunity for opposition groups to construct a collective action frame that could mobilize Egyptians to take to the streets. Mubarak set off an opportunity spiral when on February 23, 2005 he called on parliament to amend Article 76 of the constitution to permit multi-candidate presidential elections. The amendment set new electoral rules for multi-candidate elections but imposed tough new limits on potential candidates in what many viewed as yet another attempt by Mubarak to remain in power while giving his quarter-century reign a patina of legitimacy.

The blogosphere erupted in protest. Posts railing against the amendment, online banners calling for demonstrations and pervasive framing of the amendment as an assault on the constitution and political rights helped mobilize cyberactivists to take collective action against the affront. Bloggers demanded that candidates have the right to publicize their platforms in the media, called for international election monitoring and the release of political prisoners, and advocated for financial disclosure by Mubarak and his family.[116] Blogs railing against the undemocratic nature of Mubarak's presidency and demands for political choice joined the chorus of opposition activists and independent and opposition newspapers calling for accountability and

[115] http://www.arabist.net/blog/2004/12/12/protest-against-mubaraks-rule.html

[116] http://misrdigital.blogspot.com/2005/03/blog-post_110983926109680699.html

reform, in a reinforcing ijma' process in which disparate groups coalesced around a few key demands. The referendum offered citizens the chance to express their dissatisfaction and opened up debate about Mubarak's presidency, the possible succession of his son Gamal, and critiques of the political system that had kept Mubarak in power longer than any other Egyptian ruler since Muhammad Ali in the 19th century. Blogs were the forum where many youth engaged in this debate and amplified their dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Surmounting Obstacles to Collective Action: Peer-to-Peer Sharing and the Absence of Information Scarcity

Kefaya held anti-Mubarak demonstrations throughout February at the Cairo Book Fair and Cairo University followed in March by two weeks of protest at several universities by the Muslim Brotherhood, whose members had been rounded up by the hundreds in recent weeks, to demand political reform (Abdel-Latif 2005). Kefaya offered individual bloggers a cause with which to identify and helped create a new environment in which opportunities for political protest were regularly available, normalizing street demonstrations so that new practices of protest became routinized. The cross-ideological nature of the movement mirrored the cross-ideological solidarity of the blogosphere, facilitating asabiyah and ijma' between bloggers and offline activists. Virtual asabiyah made collective action of the streets less scary because people could see that others felt the same way and planned to take to the streets. Cyberactivism enabled them to overcome some of the barriers to collective action while reinforcing psychosocial bonds on and offline.

Many bloggers, particularly citizen journalists, said they felt the media were not doing a sufficient job of covering the protests and actions in the streets. "I felt somebody should provide people with accurate information about what's going on in the streets" said Abbas, who emerged

during that time as a leading blogger documenting the movement and pioneered citizen journalism in the country (Abbas 2008). In addition to documenting the ongoing social unrest, bloggers wrote about their plans to participate in these protests, publicized pictures and video of them, and called on their friends and followers to join as well. Blogs helped solve the problem of information scarcity, or not knowing if you were alone. Cyberactivism made participation visible in the virtual public sphere and thus enabled people to coordinate virtually before showing up in the embodied public sphere. Taking pictures became a key tool in the cyberactivist repertoire, especially as mobile phones became more advanced to include cameras and video recorders. When multiple people posted photos of the same protests and abuses, it was difficult for the regime to deny the facts on the ground. These accounts certified a particular version of events while peer-to-peer sharing helped amplify that version.

The photo-sharing site Flikr became a significant platform for publishing and sharing photos around this time because users could easily upload vast amounts of photos to a socially networked platform, as opposed to posting each one individually on a blog. Other users could follow that Flikr account and receive updates when new content was loaded. Thus journalists, human rights groups and others who subscribed to these photo streams would automatically be notified of new uploads. All of the pictures from each user were organized in photo streams that were described using tags (similar to keywords). Tagging photos enabled them to be searched, indexed and found online, and helped expand the reach of Egypt's cyberactivists. Egyptian Flikr users uploaded far more pictures to their streams than they typically posted on their blogs. Instead of copyrighting their photos, which would restrict their use and make it more burdensome for other users to seek permission to re-use them, activists often chose to use a Creative Commons share-and-share-alike license. This collaborative, open-source approach

encouraged the free flow of images and peer-to-peer sharing, facilitating the circular circulation of information and increasing the potential that mainstream media would use their images. When the media used these images, it certified that cyberactivist and her or her account, and potentially framed the protest in a sympathetic light.

The circular circulation of information between blogs and the mainstream media triggered mutually reinforcing mechanisms of amplification and certification. These two mechanisms were particularly important because they made visible what many Egyptians individually felt but had been reticent or unable to express publicly before. Together these mechanisms reduced information scarcity, a barrier to collective action, while setting off information cascades that intensified the impact that a few hundred people in the streets could have. Blogging about one's opinion of the president and about the need for political reform also generated debate and discussion in hundreds of individual acts of free speech. Each of these small speech acts embodied the practice of expressing oneself freely, normalizing and routinizing the expectation that such practices were a right. As Baheyya astutely observed:

> The once-rarefied topic of presidential powers, confined to constitutionalist salons, is now a very public, contentious tug of war between democrats and constitutionalists on the one hand and powerholders and their intellectuals on the other. Public debates alone will not trim the powers of the presidency, that's for sure, but they've punctured the pernicious penumbra surrounding the Egyptian president.[117]

Referendum Day Protests and the Activist Trajectory

Parliament approved Mubarak's proposal in early May and set the public referendum for May 25. Citizens were expected to vote that day on whether to approve Article 76, and judges were to oversee the process. But the regime challenged the independence of the judiciary, prompting an outcry against judicial tampering that resonated through the streets and the

[117] http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2005/03/presidential-preoccupations.html

blogosphere. The Executive branch and the NDP "devised legal rules and institutions that they said would guarantee fair elections" but that were met with "withering criticism (and) concerted action and legal challenge" by the Judges' Club, domestic monitoring groups, bloggers and the non-state media (El-Ghobashy 2006). Judges, who are mandated by law to monitor elections, threatened to boycott the election over long-standing concerns about independence and "coerced involvement in election rigging" (El-Ghobashy 2006). They ended up participating and became very active in asserting their independence and protesting against political interference in elections as well as the judiciary more broadly.

Opposition groups, including formal parties as well as Kefaya and the Muslim Brotherhood, also called for a boycott and on voting day activists and party leaders held protests against the referendum in Cairo and the Suez Canal town of Ismailia. For the first time in recent memory Egyptians took to the streets in significant numbers for domestic reasons, not for Palestine or Iraq, but to demand domestic political reform. Several hundred protesters gathered in Tharir Square for a demonstration against the amendment during which protesters chanted "*La lil tandid, la liltandith*," a refrain that echoed throughout the blogosphere. Cyberactivists amplified these on-the-ground protests in the blogosphere, and Referendum Day marked a turning point in its development by putting bloggers firmly on an activist trajectory in confrontation with the regime and focused on human rights.

When the demonstrations turned violent, a new logic of political contestation and confrontation emerged that branded the blogosphere as an oppositional, activist realm and bloggers themselves as activists. But peer-to-peer photo and video sharing changed the balance of power between the state and its citizens by making physical violence more costly because of the ability to make this violence visible through blogging and the potential such accounts would

'go viral' online. Journalists and bloggers I interviewed differed in their belief about whether the Egyptian government cared enough about how media coverage portrayed the state, although some said they felt that such coverage could in fact help mute violence. Nonetheless, many acted as if they cared, and hence blogs became important vehicles for attempting to enact such pressure. The example below is illustrative of how bloggers leveraged the power of publicity and peer-to-peer sharing in a framing contest with the regime over the violence meted out on female protesters that day.

Sexual Assaults: Framing and Isnad

Women were out in the streets in large numbers the day of the referendum and were physically assaulted by state security forces and hired thugs in a marked turn by the Egyptian government towards to use of violence targeting women. (Women demand mubarak apology 2005). Gangs of men allegedly hired by a member of the ruling NDP attacked women journalists, including blogger and *Washington Post* stringer Nora Younis, Megan Stack of the *Los Angeles Times* and a blond German correspondent, and protesters, specifically targeting women in what Younis said in an interview, was a "sexist approach." The Associated Press reported that Mubarak loyalists beat and tore the clothes off of at least one woman. And of course when violence touched foreign reporters directly they got angry and wanted to cover it. Prominent journalists and party leaders were arrested and the world press covered the violence and repression – a rather typical story in their coverage of non-democratic electoral events.[118] But it was the bloggers, who posted graphic evidence in the form of photos and video footage, who led the campaign to publicly shame the regime. "The cameras were already there," said Younis, characterizing the protest as a "breakthrough" because of the use of photos and video to

[118] http://theegyptblog.blogspot.com/2005_05_01_archive.html

document the attacks against women (Younis 2008). Ijma' between mainstream Western media and bloggers about what events had occurred on the ground validated the accounts of individual bloggers and amplified them through the mainstream global media.

The photos enabled isnad, tracing the chain of witness back to the perpetrators of the violence in a way journalists refused to do. "This was the difference between blogs and anybody else, in this protest. We had cameras and we were taking pictures of people attacking us, including Magdi Alam and two police generals in uniform, and I think this was a breakthrough," Younis told me. "I had a friend who was designer and had pictures of two of the generals and got one of Habib Al Adly from the Internet.[119] I took them to a Xerox shop in Mohandessin and the guy completely freaked out, but he printed them out because he heard it was about May 25," explained Younis. They carried the pictures at demonstrations and posted on their blogs, snatching the veil of anonymity from the attackers and exposing them to the harsh light of public opinion. The message was clear: "we are watching you, and we will scandalize you back" (Younis 2008).

The role of blogs in reporting on the abuses was widely credited by bloggers and journalists with triggering mainstream media coverage and bringing attention to bloggers as citizen journalists. "The online fuss did catch the attention of the BBC and eventually other news organizations and talk shows and people in Egypt are a bit more aware about sexual harassment as a result, and things are happening," according to one blogger, whose translation of a detailed Arabic post from Malcolm-X into English brought her "loads and loads of hits and links" (Forsoothsayer 2008). Malek Mustafa, author of Malcolm-X and the first blogger to post about the attacks, saw his average of 30 comments per post increase astronomically to 750 on these

[119] He was the Interior Minister at the time and through until the time of his arrest in February 2011.

posts (Al Malky 2007). Bloggers succeeded in both setting the mainstream news agenda and framing the coverage of the episode. This event marked a turning point in the power of the blogs to mobilize collective action frames and use their blogs to influence mainstream media coverage.

Focusing on the sexual assaults made the story stand out and garnered media coverage by the local and international press, and galvanized international NGOs to offer these cyberactivists the resources of their transnational networks and to pressure governments on their behalf (Slackman 2005). Independent print media and satellite news channels were scandalized and ran pictures for weeks, certifying the accounts of bloggers, adopting their framing strategy and amplifying the role of cyberactivists who provided them with footage and first-hand accounts. When mainstream media adopted the frame promulgated by oppositional forces rather than the state, they also contributed to the certification of that frame as valid and thus the credibility of those on the winning side of the framing contest. But this did not translate into changes on the ground, as no one was held accountable for the violence. "I could give names, I gave pictures and details about specifics," said Younis, but nothing happened and the file was closed for lack of identification of the perpetrators.

Two important developments occurred: taking pictures became a key objective at every demonstration, and those in the high ranks of government and security services realized there was mounting social pressure that cyberactivists could use against them. The attackers started hiding their faces, said Younis, but there was always a blogger with a camera or mobile phone ready to snap a picture and they leveraged the power of publicity to name and shame.

For example, about 30 to 40 of the women who were sexually harassed formed a group called "The Street is Ours" and held a conference at the press syndicate to raise awareness of the issue. In another case, an Egyptian mom named Ghada Shahbandar created a grassroots initiative

called *Shayfeenkum* (We See You) to help ordinary people monitor and report on security forces. She created a site that enabled anyone to report human rights violations online and to attach photographs, and then to forward to newspapers and government ministries.[120] The power to make visible, conduct isnad in real time and connect ordinary people with the media and government was enabled by the Internet, and empowered ordinary people to become more politically active in a country where just a few years later only four percent of the population said they had ever voiced their opinion to a public official, the lowest in the world (Abu Dhabi Gallup Center 2011).

Symbiosis Between Movements: Asabiyah and Cross-Ideational Ijma'

Throughout 2005 and 2006 the Kefaya movement inspired people to demand change by taking to the streets and speaking out; especially bloggers who shared the same desire for change and felt drawn to Kefaya's non-hierarchical, decentralized structure and approach. An affinity developed between Kefaya leaders and cyberactivists the former focused its Internet strategy firstly on bloggers, who attended and blogged about protests. They, in turn, gained important on-the-ground training and experience. According to Rania Al Malky, editor of the English-language *Daily News Egypt*: "If Kifaya has provided the political space for voices of opposition to speak out, blogs have provided the means for Kefaya's mobilization" (2007, 4). A blogger who had supported the movement but did not identify as a 'member' of Kefaya explained: "The existence of a parallel society online existed before it was on the streets, and Kefaya never would have existed if this didn't exist online" (Farag 2008).

Bloggers were overwhelmingly young, urban, and elite, since at the time of Kefaya's emergence computers and Internet access were largely restricted to the country's upper and

[120] http://www.shayfeen.com

middle classes. This group was the movement's prime target, according to its coordinator and co-founder George Ishaq. "Our movement is an elite movement," he told me in an interview, adding that the younger generation was its target audience (Ishaq 2006). Many bloggers identified with Kefaya or attended their demonstrations but several rejected the idea of being "in" the movement or party because they rejected organized politics in Egypt generally (al-Omran 2008; Gharbeia 2008a; Naje 2008). With the support of these bloggers, Kefaya employed a successful electronic media strategy that included using the Internet to disseminate its messages, and to document abuses by the authorities. Kefaya also included some of the Muslim Brotherhood's leading bloggers: Abdel Monem Mahmoud, Mustafa al-Naggar, Mohammed Adel, and others.

Kefaya launched a series of protests and there were "regular, almost cyclical outbreak of protests and demonstrations in both large cities and smaller towns," as Baheyya observed in a March 25, 2005 post. These included more than 250 labor strikes in 2004, a 200 percent increase over the previous year, and at least 222 in 2005 (Ottaway and Hamzawy 2011, 2-3). But it was difficult to obtain a permit, confirm attendance, publicize it to a wide enough audience, and generally figure out how to make it work, as Sandmonkey discovered when he attempted to organize his own demonstration on July 24, 2005.

In a July 25, 2005 blog post, he detailed the lengths he went to attempting to organize a protest via email, instant messaging and phone calls to like-minded bloggers. "I wrote what I thought was a "rallying" post and then sent it by e-mail to every single Egyptian blogger I knew or could fine (*sic*)" he wrote in a description on his blog, noting with disappointment that only one blogger replied to his email and the El Ghad and Youth for Change parties were not interested in getting involved for fear of provoking Mubarak. "The Egyptian blogosphere is almost as apathetic as the Egyptian public: Big on words, small on action. Actually when I think

about it, that's the problem of our country as a whole," he continued. And indeed, one of the challenges activists faced in 2005 was an apathetic public whose fear and hopelessness left many unwilling and uninspired to take to the streets in the massive numbers needed to provoke major political change. They had not yet figured out how to frame these issues so that they would have resonance with a wider public, or how to transcend the physical/virtual divide. And because they did not succeed in this framing they were unable to build the ijma' they needed across a broader base of society.

Sandmonkey's statements also reveal that the dominant cyberactivism platforms still relied to a large extent on manually pushing *out* messages to networks, which were still relatively small and personalized. For example, people can reply to an email message or a blog post, but someone must make the first move and that action is not publicized across related networks, the way it would be on Facebook, for example. The affiliation and asabiyah with Kefaya, therefore, facilitated and nurtured the growth of the blogosphere as a realm of cyberactivism.

The spring of 2006 saw more protests in support of judicial independence. The judges' issue became a rallying point for bloggers following the refusal of two senior judges to enter court without their lawyers to defend against their prosecution for calling the 2005 presidential and legislative elections fraudulent. As reports and photos of plainclothes security forces beating peaceful demonstrators were disseminated through the blogs, outrage grew and drew international condemnation (Human Rights Watch 2006a). "Judges' contemporary mobilisation (*sic*) has sown seeds sure to be reaped by them in future iterations of struggle... Most fortuitous in my view is one unexpected process of linkage that's not likely to be sundered any time soon," wrote Baheyya.[121] These linkages enabled activists to build ijma' across broader swaths of the

[121] http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2005_08_01_archive.html

public and ensure there ijma' occurred beyond the confines of the blogosphere. But while there may have been linkages across these groups, a series of arrests of prominent bloggers for their participation in and support of the judges' demonstrations also led to growing disillusionment with Kefaya's leaders and the breakdown of asabiyah.

The Breakdown of Asabiyah

By late 2006, bloggers were abandoning Kefaya, and the movement's decline was fueled in part by withdrawal of support by Core and Activist bloggers. Many bloggers who began blogging when Kefaya started were disenchanted by the ossification of the movement into what they viewed as the same type of corrupt, self-serving organization that characterized all the other political parties. The lack of participation by many of the leaders in the street demonstrations and their willingness to allow young activists to bear the brunt of the repercussions disillusioned several of the activist bloggers, leading to the breakdown of ijma' on how to achieve political reform and putting up barriers to collective action.

At the same time, the alliance between Kefaya's Islamists and secularists had largely broken down amid disagreements about divisive issues like the *hijab*, its accommodating stance towards the U.S. and a general failure to present a plan for action beyond an anti-Mubarak stance (Oweidat et al. 2008, 32-35). An anti-veiling article posted on Kefaya's website prompted several leading pro-Islamists to break with the group (Mansour 2009, 211-212). Muslim Brothers and Sisters found they could no longer engage in *ijma'* with Kefaya. They were enable to construct a compelling narrative within Kefaya's collective action frame because it became exclusionary and no longer resonated with them, instead clashing with their values and identity as Islamists. The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups accused Kefaya of sidelining

them, and by 2007 many among Kefaya's earliest and most vocal supporters were disillusioned and proclaiming its death knell.

Nawara Negm, daughter of a famous dissident father and Islamic feminist mother and author of the blog The Popular Front for Raving,[122] described how the bonds of asabiyah were damaged and the tactics of the two movements diverged. Kefaya leaders called for a demonstration one day and many young supporters turned out but were forced to bare the brunt of the regime's response on their own because Kefaya leaders were nowhere to be found and were unreachable by phone even as bloggers were being arrested and beaten. The reproach and disdain in her voice as she described what happened underscored that Kefaya had crossed a line that would make it impossible to restore asabiyah:

> Many young people who believed in Kefaya – and they made great sacrifices – went to the demonstration. But the big heads of Kefaya, well they vanished on this day … we even called them and they didn't answer. They turned their phones off! And the young people were arrested. (Negm 2008)

Yet although these Kefaya leaders were conspicuously absent, and the lawyers unreachable, those same figures appeared on Al Jazeera "talking about their heroism," said Negm. After that many of the activist bloggers decided they would no longer participate in Kefaya-sponsored activities or demonstrate on the street (Mustafa 2008; Negm 2008). As one of them explained:

> I don't believe in demonstrating, especially in Tharir Square. I don't encourage people to go to demonstrations because you don't want to go. To take those members, those activists, and hand-deliver them to the police?! What do you gain by delivering your most active and most trusted activists to the police? You gain those great elitists who appear on TV saying that *they* are heroes. But they're not!" (Negm 2008)

[122] http://tahyyes.blogspot.com/

The withdrawal of support by bloggers represented the breakdown of ijma', or consensus, about the means of political protest coupled with weakening of solidarity caused by the bloggers' perceived hypocrisy of the older generation reinforced the breakdown of these two mechanisms.

But the breaking down of ijma' was also due to the perception that the Brotherhood was overstepping its mandate. MB supporters created rifts with their secular counterparts and coreligionists by trying to put issues on the agenda that lacked consensus, leading to perceptions, that they were hijacking the movement for their own objectives. Nermeena, whose hybrid English and Latinized Arabic blog was one of the oldest in Egypt,[123] got fed up with the whole thing and left Kefaya because of disagreements with the MB. "Two men from the opposition movement Kefaya—a Muslim Brotherhood leader and the head of the leftist Revolutionary Socialist movement—pulled out a bullhorn and began calling for the end of President Mubarak's regime, and a moment of silence for a female Palestinian suicide bomber. I left after a while," Nermeena said. "I thought, if we are not making ourselves clear, then why are we doing this?" (Otterman 2007, 7). As competing, exclusionary narratives emerged it became harder to conduct ijma' and for supporters to maintain ties within the network.

Many Core bloggers were arrested at various protests during this period, including Alaa Abdel Fatah, Malek Mustafa, Sharqawi and many others, yet few Kefaya leaders could say the same. Malek said he got arrested three times in 2006 alone (Mustafa 2008). Some bloggers remained nominally involved but increasingly wondered if Kefaya was even a movement by the end of 2006. Several bloggers pointed to Dec. 2006 as the final nail in Kefaya's coffin, when only a handful of people turned out to support the Sudanese refugees who, after months of protest in Mohandessin, were violently expelled and several people killed. The failure of either

[123] http://nerro.wordpress.com/

bloggers or Kefaya to mobilize collective action during this episode underscored the fact that they could not trigger the mechanisms required for collective action since ijma' and asabiyah were absent, and the mainstream media did not certify or amplify the accounts of the few bloggers who were present to document the abuses. A description of what occurred follows that details both the specific ways that cyberactivism was inextricably linked with the embodied public sphere and how cyberactivists sought to enact specific mechanisms, and why they did not always succeed. It also underscores the relevance that time and timing played in these contentious politics.

The Sudanese Refugee Incident 'failure'

In the wee hours of Dec. 30, 2006 Egyptian security forces raided a public square in the upscale Mohandessin neighborhood and rounded up hundreds of Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers who had been engaged in a peaceful sit-in in from of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. The following example exemplifies an 'unsuccessful' case of cyberactivism, as judged by cyberactivists, because it largely failed to save the refugees themselves or to activate the broader transnational activist networks or media attention needed to trigger key sequences in their repertoires. Yet the very fact that the raid was documented and archived in the public sphere was a small victory for the refugees and the cyberactivists who cared, and helped generate dialogue in which resistance was articulated that undermined the state's hegemonic narrative.

At about 10:30 pm on December 29, Nora Younis received an SMS from a friend about unusually heavy police presence in Mohandessin. Younis described how she went about reporting on the raid: obtaining credible information, documenting what she saw and activating

her network. She also revealed how citizen journalism required new tools and sets of practices to be successful.

> I had my camera on me but I was completely unprepared... I put a call in somewhere and then we started working. I was not on Twitter at this time, and because I was not prepared for this, my battery was not full on my cell phone… We realized something was going to happen with the Sudanese refugees. They were using public buses so I started documenting the plate numbers of the public buses being used, how many prison cars there were, I sent warning messages to people – human rights lawyers, activists, media -- and people started responding. (Younis 2008)

The message Younis sent was the first salvo in a battle to build ijma' about the need to protect the refugees and create asabiyah with the refuges to spark resistance among a broader groups to the actions of the authorities. In her description, the central role that the mobile phone played in performing citizen journalism made it evident that activists need to always be "fully charged." Younis also reveals in her phrasing how Twitter had become an important tool for citizen journalists and cyberactivists more broadly by 2008 by specifically pointing out that she was not yet on Twitter. This limited her amplification efforts and contributed to the failure to generate an information cascade.

Yet despite her journalistic blog posts, she described her first response as a "human rights" one: pursuing the buses and documenting the detail that would provide evidence while getting in touch with key human rights lawyers. In a post on Dec. 30 entitled "Disgraced to be Egyptian: A Testimony" Younis wrote a minute-by-minute description of what happened, provided numbers for the buses she saw hauling the refugees away, and provided photographic support for her account. "Manal called and said write your testimony, we need your testimony," Younis said in an interview, and so she did. Her coverage was used in human rights reports, picked up by some independent media including Global Voices, and translated into several

languages (Younis 2008). This coverage was an attempt at ijma' in the blogosphere that did not, however, result in amplification and certification by the mainstream media.

But the incident barely registered in the mainstream media; because of the holiday several key nodes in the network were out of town: Michael Slackman of the *New York Times* was out of the country, and other cyberactivists in her network expressed anger over the events but could not make it there themselves. The time and date of the attack conspired against the activists. "People were angry but weren't there. There's nothing we can do to stop what was happening," said Younis. No leaders from Kefaya turned up and thus there was no reinforcement from the movement either. So armed with a mobile phone and a camera she set out to document what she saw happening and provide what assistance she could, including getting a lawyer inside with the refugees. "We were careful because if get arrested won't be able to help," she continued:

> We were on the 10th floor watching the battlefield. I took pictures from upstairs. I started documenting: What is the time, what is happening, just taking notes, how many ambulances, the bodies. I realized I was there to document. I couldn't get people there or stop it. It was my responsibility, I was freaking out, crying. It's power, I don't want to call them the victims, but it gives power to the people who were violated, I mean this is my personal feeling. If I have a camera I feel strong, even if no one there to support… It makes a violated person strong, it balances the power a little bit. (Younis 2008)

This quote illustrates the empowerment that bloggers felt, even if they were unmatched against a powerful state-security apparatus, their use of technology gave them a feeling of power. Thus regardless of whether they were able to translation their blogging into a concrete outcome, the psychosocial shift they experienced was cumulative and undermined the hegemony of the state in their imagination. Other bloggers took up the cause, which became known as the Mohandessin Massacre, including *Torture in Egypt* blogger Noha Atef. "The first cause I concentrated blogging on was this massacre," Noha said in an interview (2008). "I thought I

should collect everything: the testimonies, the photos, statements by NGOs and even governmental statements. I found I did something helpful, because if someone was searching about the massacre they would find something useful." Someone named Maryam wrote a comment the next day on Younis' blog that summed up the power of blogs and the failure of Egyptian media in playing the role of the Fourth Estate:

> Thank you for taking the time and effort to report everything that you saw in such detail. It is always on the borders of the world that the system reveals its true face... Yet again, the Mubarak regime has brought infamy upon Egypt. The state-owned press is already reporting more on the numbers of Egyptian security forces injured than the reasons for why 20 Sudanese died…This system will not last. It is on its last legs. It scores minor victories against innocents, but its guilt is displayed for all to see. Your post, and hundreds like it, helps Egyptians to see that Egypt deserves better than Mubarak can ever offer.[124]

Posts like this and others certified cyberactivists as playing the role of the Fourth Estate and as being good and honorable Egyptians. As Nora noted, and analysis of the media coverage of the incident supports, the media that bothered to cover the massacre at all did so out of context and with a slanted perspective on what happened. Nora's frame was that of social justice, which resonated with the blogosphere and cyberactivists as they linked to and disseminated her coverage, playing their own role in the circulation of information via the micropolitics of blogging. Yet cyberactivists lost the framing and the agenda-setting contest, perhaps because they lacked the numbers to saturate coverage as they did in episodes such as the Eid al-Fitr, Emad al-Kabir or Khaled Said incidents or the personal stories that made stories of torture and human rights abuses resonate with a broader public.

[124] http://norayounis.com/2005/12/30/200830

"Kefaya is dead but we continue"

Despite the deterioration of asabiyah between the cyberactivists and Kefaya, Kefaya's leaders claimed their greatest accomplishment was changing people's aversion to direct government confrontation and opening up new spaces for dissent – namely the public sphere, whether on the street or in cyberspace. And their success in 2004 and 2005 inspired other social movements in the region that adopted the name Kefaya.[125] By focusing on a simple message that diverse groups could support and creating a decentralized, non-hierarchical organization, the movement enjoyed huge support in its early years before succumbing to much of the same in-fighting as previous protest movements.[126] The in-fighting and political opportunism at the expense of the young bloggers destroyed asabiyah and the movement no longer resonated with many of them. But while Kefaya may have facilitated and nurtured the growth of young activists, its decline as a political force did not coincide with the decline of blogging and cyberactivism. "I started with blogging when Kefaya started existing. Now Kefaya is dead and we continue" (Mustafa 2008).

Indeed, nearly all the Egyptian bloggers knew each other virtually or otherwise in the early years of blogging. The way they described that time and their relationship to other Egyptians they met through blogging indicated a strong sense of asabiyah because of blogging, and said they read every blog in Egypt because there were so few. This self-identification of themselves as a community helped give shape to the emerging blogosphere and distinguish it

[125] Political activists in Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan and elsewhere briefly adopted the name 'Kefaya' for their own political protest movements.

[126] In the mid-1990s there was poor interaction between parties and groups causing them to splinter into different groups. The Nasserist breakoffs founded the Karama party, while the Islamists who had wanted the Muslim Brotherhood to focus on building a political party broke off to form the Al Wassat party, though they were still awaiting legal recognition by the government when Kefaya emerged (Shorbagy 2007).

from the Arab or global blogosphere more generally. Commenting on each other's blogs was seen as a "duty" by these early bloggers, as well as a way to meet, identify and engage with this new community in the blogosphere. Indeed the necessity of commenting underscored how blogging, and social media more generally, were communication systems designed for participation and thus those who participated were taking the fullest advantage of these systems. Commenting was a form of ijma' around the values of the early blogosphere, and asabiyah, as many used their real names and explicitly welcomed new bloggers to the community. Indeed it would have been much harder to develop these social bonds, and to take online relationships offline, if anonymity was the norm. They developed virtual relationships through discovering, reading and commenting on each other's blogs, and translated these into embodied friendships through offline community building.

Although they initially met each other in the blogosphere, they came to know each other through face-to-face interactions, joint participation in protests and the development of friendships. In the early years, this first generation of bloggers held *iftars*[127] and other meetups that would provided opportunities for connecting their virtual and embodied selves and were a critical part of developing a group identity and social cohesion. The virtual and embodied interactions created and reinforced asabiyah among the young generation of cyberactivists by reinforcing the normative values of the community, e.g. around freedom of expression and the notion of what being "a blogger" meant.

Indeed, asabiyah was one of the mechanisms that helped the blogosphere expand, and the decline of solidarity between bloggers and Kefaya in many ways strengthened asabiyah within the blogosphere. Although the blogosphere continued to grow in the wake of Kefaya, virtual

[127] An iftar is the nightly meal that breaks the day-long fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

enclaves arose and asabiyah was activated at certain key moments rather than organically developed through close on- and offline interactions between all members of the group. Later generations of bloggers thus had somewhat different dynamics to contend with, and had not received the same experience and training that the first generation of Egyptian bloggers had.

Although Kefaya continued to exist, without the linkage with the blogosphere it seemed to shrivel and fade away even as the blogosphere became more vibrant and active. Bloggers and cyberactivists de-certified the movement by no longer affiliating with the movement, removing supportive banners on their blogs and no longer writing posts in support of the movement. Because there was no longer a shared purpose or collective action frame, the blogosphere did not amplify Kefaya's message or certify its calls for protest by showing up. The link between on and offline activism in asabiyah with Kefaya was severed.

Nonetheless, the sum total of this new activism was that "something irrevocable has been set in motion, a process whose consequences we cannot fully fathom now."[128] Indeed, what was set in process was a narrative about injustice, repression and resentment under the current regime that came to pervade the blogosphere and beyond and lay the groundwork for a revolutionary uprising. For in order for a social movement to emerge, as Barrington Moore argued in his study of revolutions through history, "moral anger and a sense of social injustice have to be discovered" (Moore 1978, 15). The blogosphere is where many youth made this discovery. "Bloggers are those people who care about their country and want to make it better" explained one cyberactivist (Naje 2008). Therefore, even when the election of Hamas in Palestine prompted the Bush administration to retreat on its democracy agenda in late 2006 and increased repression and socioeconomic unrest made political contestation more dangerous, youth

[128] http://baheyya.blogspot.com/2005_08_01_archive.html

continued to enact a form of citizenship in the blogosphere, seeking a freer and more progressive public sphere, publicizing social injustice and enacting rights and responsibilities within their own community.

Some found solidarity with the worker's movement, others with the human rights, women's rights or social justice communities, lending their cyberactivism skills to various causes and campaigns. Labor strikes became increasingly common, with the number of such episodes of social unrest increasing year after year, with at least 1000 strikes documented in 2009 alone (Beinin 2009, 15; Ottaway and Hamzawy 2011). And whereas earlier in the decade the state media had largely ignored the rising unrest, bloggers and cyberactivists helped frame labor issues as a key concern in the broader public sphere. "These demonstrations were not originally known, but the political environment changed and consequently the media coverage has changed" explained an independent newspaper editor (El-Kahky 2006). The frame Kefaya had constructed about the need for change and enough of politics as usual became little more than hollow rhetoric and lost its ability to mobilize collective action. Thus even as Kefaya faded into the milieu of politics as usual, bloggers found other inspiration and continued to use cyberactivism as their primary articulation of political contestation.

Much of this inspiration came from the crackdown on human rights, including freedom of expression, which coincided with the decline of Kefaya in 2006. Significant human rights abuses occurred under Mubarak's rule, including torture, illegal detainment and inhumane treatment in prison, excessive use of police powers and restrictions on free expression including religion.[129] Egypt consistently ranked at the bottom of the list with respect to civil liberties, political rights,

[129] Although there is a significant Coptic Christian minority, Sunnis comprise more than 90 percent of the Arab world's most populous Muslim country Egypt. 2009. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html (accessed 15 Nov. 2009).

and freedom of expression. In the early 2000s Mubarak loosened restrictions on the press and a period of relative opening occurred. But if the annual scorecards released by rights organizations like Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) were any indication, the government cracked down rather than loosened up its attempts to control the public sphere. Egypt fell nearly 50 places between 2002 and 2008 on RSF's annual Freedom of Expression rankings from 101st place to 146th place. In 2007, Freedom House upgraded Egypt from not free to partly free in its annual Freedom of the Press report, though it only barely managed to retain its status as partly free with a score of 60, 61 being the cut off for Not Free. It was one of the only countries in the world that ranked higher in press freedom than it did in the *Freedom of the World* report, which measures a broad array of political rights and civil liberties. But the expansion of the Arab media field and the influence of new media like satellite TV and the Internet coincided with a push by the U.S. democracy promotion in the Middle East in 2004 and 2005 that helped set the conditions for a partial opening of political space and the emergence of a new public sphere.

Making Dissidents: Torture, Arrests and the Framing of Freedom of Expression Battles

Egyptian government policy was to a large extent responsible for helping spur the development of bloggers into activists by adopting unpopular policies and cracking down on citizens who attempted to demonstrate against them. Yet instead of making them afraid and prompting bloggers to discontinue their activities, crackdowns inspired more youth to begin blogging and thus potentially put themselves at risk. As Meyer notes, "dissidents" and "activists" are created through common cause and the construction of identity around that cause, which is often in response to government policies and configurations of the political environment. He

offers the example of Eastern Europe, where "the state, by limiting democratic means of participation, turns everyone with a grievance into a democracy activist" (Meyer, Whittier, and Robnett 2002, 13). Repression often fails to contain contention and can actually have the opposite effect of amplifying and diffusing it (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). This was certainly the case in Egypt. Indeed it was notable that in 2008 that so many bloggers I interviewed said that government repression was not a factor in prompting them to stop or reduce their blogging (it was the availability of time and the schedule of exams, as previously noted).

Responses by the regime imbued micropolitical actions like posting a blog or creating a Facebook page with meaning, as when security forces close particular online accounts or arrested a blogger or Facebook group creator. The regime's response gave meaning to those particular events or practices and thus reinforced the symbolic power of bloggers and cyberactivists and asabiyah within their community. Thus even a rather mundane social practice such as blogging took on significant political meaning and created meaning for the bloggers about their rights to express themselves and imagine a different future. Alternatives to ideologies and authoritarian systems will be realized "in the interaction among people and in their capacity to redefine their situation and to act in concert," and it was the young bloggers that led the way in redefining the situation in Egypt as untenable (Goldfarb 2006, 131). Indeed, my analysis follows Goldfarb in arguing that a shared change in the definition of the situation had to become public and had to be acted upon in order for the structural conditions to lead to change (Goldfarb 2006, 39). Bloggers not only promoted the right to freedom of expression, they seized this right and enacted it despite intimidation from the regime, refusing to give in to fear and becoming empowered through their blogging.

Arresting and harassing bloggers helped create their identities and the notion of a "cause" around freedom of expression while providing a focal point through which to develop asabiyah. Just as arrests targeted liberals, techies, the Muslim Brotherhood, and socialists, so too did asabiyah develop across groups as alliances were created to demand the release of those bloggers. These campaigns illustrate how a preoccupation with determining the "success" or "failure" of collective action fails to see how attitudes and expectations shifted and created new opportunity structures; how young Egyptians honed their leadership skills; how the practices and discourse in these episodes normalized dissent and free expression; how cross ideological coalitions formed; and how practices and tactical repertoires adapted to shifting circumstances and technology. Looking only at the macro level or within formal political structures limits our ability to see how the micropolitics of participation created a new technologically mediated public sphere with few, if any, red lines, where the abuses of the regime could be put defiantly on display by its own citizens. Thus even collective action that may have been perceived as not being successful, for example because an activist remained imprisoned or a campaigned failed to garner mainstream media attention, nonetheless had important ramifications on group cohesion, normative claim-making and learning.

Blogging preceded the development of the youth movement, and it was the solidarity and normative commitments of the early Egyptian blogosphere helped create the youth movement that became a defining political movement in post-millennial Egypt. The blogging movement in Egypt was significant because it was a case where young activists developed new contentious repertoires and new forms of collective action, including blogging, citizen journalism, and social media networks, to bring about political change. Although the blogosphere was a diverse array of personal diaries, journalistic accounts, rants and raves and opinion, some blogs were particularly

concerned with politics, and seek to report, document, and challenge both the institutional media and the government. Cyberactivists engaged in political organization, fundraising, and ideological articulation and were increasingly perceived as political actors by the state. They were also adept at integrating the dominant modalities of communication and leveraging their distinctive qualities in creative and unexpected ways, and in doing so managed to stay ahead of the Mubarak regime.

Unintended Consequences of Repression and Arrests

Claiming the right to freedom of speech and association was central to the development and expansion of the blogosphere, and doing so in one's own name was an important way of claiming this right. Publicity was a key mechanism of contention throughout nearly the entire blogosphere, for it represented an act of defiance against a regime that would silence its critics and resistance against social norms that would mandate certain topics or identities as inappropriate or confined only to the private sphere. Organizing protests to draw attention to issues, particularly related to freedom of speech and legal frameworks, become one of the claims-making routines bloggers routinely engaged in as part of their repertoires of contention. Cyberactivists would organize demonstrations in key public spaces like the press, lawyers or judges syndicate or in the symbolic center of Egypt, Tahrir Square, in downtown Cairo just across from the *Mugawwama*, the main government administrative offices. They filmed, blogged, tweeted and took picture of these embodied protests, circulating images and accounts of their youth-driven defiance and the repression that often followed.

Such protests also provided an opportunity for cyberactivists to connect with other interested groups, such as journalists, lawyers and judges, and for citizen journalists to identify and be identified with their professional counterparts. Cyberactivists paid a heavy price for their

embodied activism, for only when they were physically present could they be arrested. And indeed many bloggers said they were often targeted specifically as the authorities became aware of their role in organizing and publicizing such collective action. These protests were struggles to gain political rights from the regime or prevent them from taking them away, but were also important symbolic opportunities to build asabiyah and coalitions across virtual and embodied groups and grab public attention. As the anecdote below illustrates, activists often had to negotiate meaning, framing and tactics as the protests occurred. It also reveals that the regime was well aware of the power of images to frame and inflame and actively sought to prevent activists from taking photos and video, hoping to squelch the peer-to-peer sharing that would activate the circular circulation of information in the blogosphere.

Throughout the period of study cyberactivists and citizen journalists were arrested and many of them were tortured. The targeting of young bloggers in their early to mid-twenties was a story that exemplified the repression of the Mubarak regime. The arrests targeting bloggers started in mid-2006 amid the ongoing Kefaya protests and demonstrations in support of judicial independence, putting the vast chasm between the political aspirations of youth and their actual rights into high relief. Many Core bloggers were arrested and re-arrested during this time as the Mubarak regime attempted to silence their online criticism and stave the wave of criticism being levied against his efforts to reign in judicial and journalistic independence and clamp down on demands for reform. But arresting bloggers helped turn them into folk heroes and ensured that not only they would become more widely known, but that blogging and cyberactivism would gain greater attention as well, especially when they returned to blogging or continued to blog from jail. Arrests triggered asabiyah within the blogosphere, amplification via the mainstream

media and NGOs as well as within the virtual public sphere, and certification of these young cyberactivists as threatening to the regime.

The imprisonment of bloggers for their activism on the streets in demonstrations was a personal hardship but strengthened asabiyah and helped draw attention to them and get youth interested in learning about and working with the new technology. They also linked by their identity group 'blogger.' The importance of this identity in mobilizing support and solidarity, especially regarding issues of human rights, was evident in the various blogger campaigns. On May 25, 2006, just a few days before I arrived in Cairo, Muslim Brotherhood blogger Mohammed al-Sharqawi was arrested at a peaceful demonstration against the regime's crackdown on judicial impendence and arrest of activists over the previous month (including himself, Alaa Abdel Fattah, Malek Mustafa, Ahmed al-Droubi, among other cyberactivists). He was carrying a sign that read, "I want my rights." The 24-year-old was beaten, sodomized, and tortured then denied access to medical attention, leading his lawyer, Gamal Eid, to characterize the attack by police officers "pure sadism," adding that he had not "seen anyone that badly tortured in 12 years" (Human Rights Watch 2006d). But instead of remaining silent as would have been expected due to the sexual assault and fear of retribution, Sharqawi exposed and scandalized the police by blogging about it and talking to the media. He smuggled notes out of prison, which a friend then posted to his blog in a series entitle *Days of Isolation* [Arabic] that detailed his daily struggle to get access to a shower, get food, and interact with guards.[130] The blogosphere rallied around him, posting English translations of his account of being tortured,

[130] http://www.speaksfreely.net/node/55 and http://www.speaksfreely.net/node/57

protesting against his imprisonment, and most of all attacking the Mubarak regime.[131] This peer-to-peer sharing and translation helped amplify his story beyond his circle of friends and certify his account of what happened.

The abuse he suffered prompted outrage and asabiyah throughout the blogosphere and across ideological lines, "When they arrested Sharqawi and tortured him it was to intimidate the others, all the political activists, all the young activists of Kefaya, all the bloggers because Mohamed is a blogger as well," said Zekry in an interview. Cyberactivists posted about Sharqawi's arrest and other bloggers who were picked up during protests, writing about the torture they experienced in a way that no one had ever done before.[132] In fact, a journalist with Al Jazeera who made a documentary about torture in Egypt was convicted of damaging Egypt's national interests and publishing false news and sentenced in absentia to six months in prison. Yet bloggers continued to raise awareness about torture and face personal risk. "From that time they threatened [Sharqawi] indirectly in several ways, they intimidated him several times," explained another cyberactivist, but added that his friend refused to give in (Zekry 2008). Similarly Malek described his own arrests almost as a badge of honor. "I got arrested three times in 2006, four times in 2007, three times in 2008. But I never got arrested before 2006, now it's 12 times. And every time I go to start anything, it's like 'Oh Malek, oh come.' I'm not doing anything and they just take me and beat me." he said, referring to the security services (Mustafa 2008).

Such repression was a double-edged sword for the Mubarak regime, since the arrests of bloggers prompted other bloggers to launch campaigns advocating for their release, which in turn

[131] See for example http://www.arabist.net/blog/2006/5/28/letter-from-sharqawi.html and http://www.sandmonkey.org/2006/05/28/on-justice/

[132] see for example http://ircpresident.blogspot.com/2006/07/free-mohamed-el-sharkawy-and-karim-el.html

activated transnational activist and media networks. Cyberactivists deployed various social media tools to grab attention and attempt to force the regime to let them go, whether through direct pressure or circuitously via the moral power of international rights groups or the influence of governments such as the United Sates or Great Britain. The state's onslaught against media freedom and bloggers in 2006 and 2007 coincided with a broader political crackdown that targeted Kefaya and the Muslim Brotherhood (Reporters Sans Frontières 2007; Human Rights Watch 2007).[133] One blogger termed the government's harsh reactions a "War on Bloggers."[134] This could have been due their increased coverage of state-sponsored violence and campaigns against torture in Egypt propelled the issue to the forefront of the public agenda and became one the most palpable examples of the framing impact of blogs and their ability to bring new issues into the public sphere.

The campaigns to free arrested cyberactivists were particularly important episodes of contention because they provided a mobilizing frame for building asabiyah as well as opportunities to try out new cyberactivist tools and virtual protest repertoires. Eventually they had developed a set of tactics and mechanisms that could be activated as soon as someone was arrested. These campaigns involved similar mechanisms and processes that were adapted to the dominant platforms of the moment, including posting information about their arrests, kidnapping and assaults on their blogs and social media, accompanied by pictures, video and detailed eye-witness accounts in an attempt to counteract official version of events and gain control of the dominant frame. These accounts also provided transnational human rights and journalist groups with information and documentation to enable them to get involved. Cyberactivists created

[133] see also http://arabist.net/arabawy/2007/03/25/police-crackdown-on-kefaya-demo-demonstrators-kidnapped/

[134] http://norayounis.com/2007/05/08/180851

banner ads, distributed logos calling on the government to "Free blogger x" and even posted messages on their blogs written by the imprisoned bloggers on paper smuggled out during visits. Supporters could then post these banners, or replace their Facebook pictures with that of the imprisoned blogger, in an effort to raise awareness and show solidarity. The two examples below illustrate how the concatenation of tactics coupled with the technological characteristics of the media being used activated configuration of causal mechanisms that made authoritarian control difficult and limited the regime's choices of how to respond.

The Free Alaa Campaign (2006)

One of the most innovative campaigns at the time was the campaign to free Alaa Abdel Fattah, who was also arrested in May 2006. "Without him, the police hoped, the Egyptian blogosphere would fall apart entirely. Ironically, for precisely that reason Alaa's arrest was not going to pass without some serious local and international scrutiny," which included rallies in several Western capitals, coverage by major media heavyweights and leading bloggers, and an online petition that garnered more than 1000 signatures (Adam 2006). Cyberactivists set up a Free Alaa blog to aggregate information[135] and linked up with cyberactivists from Global Voices to launch the "Google-bombing for Alaa campaign," which involved manipulating search engine rankings for the word 'Egypt' so that the free-Alaa campaign site would top of the search results, a technological version of agenda-setting.[136] Search results for the phrase 'FreeAlaa' skyrocketed to 330,000 in the first weeks of the campaign to more than one million by June, according to one

[135] http://freealaa.blogspot.com

[136] http://sabbah.biz/mt/archives/2006/05/10/google-bombing-for-alaa-press-release/

blogger's test.[137] Although the attempt at Google bombing was deemed a failure since 'Egypt' is too common a word, the innovative campaign tactic garnered such widespread attention in the media and among activists that in fact it was also a success because of this amplification. The thousands of bloggers who wrote about his case and posted banner ads calling for his release helped compel the mainstream media to cover his story and indirectly put pressure on the Egyptian government. "They can't silence us on the Internet so they try to silence us on the street, and we won't give in on either front" wrote Sandmonkey in an op-ed for *The Guardian* (Adam 2006).

Figure 7 Banner used in the 2006 Free Alaa cyberactivst campaign.

The Free Philip Rizk Campaign (2009)

The incident of the kidnapping/arrest of blogger Philip Rizk illustrates how cyberactivist tools had become a standard part of protest repertoires, even though only about 21 percent of the population was online at that time (Internet usage statistics for Africa 2009). It is also an example of why cyberactivism was a particularly powerful mode of contention. Cyberactivism could invoke resources not available to those outside the blogosphere and thus underscores the critical role that being able to activate transnational asabiyah, amplification and certification mechanisms played in successful campaigns.

[137] http://adloyada.typepad.com/adloyada/2006/06/after_a_total_o.html

In February 2009, Rizk was spirited away by the Egyptian police after he was 'detained' on his way back from a solidarity march for Gaza. As Sarah Carr, a *Daily News* journalist and blogger, reported on February 8, he was surreptitiously taken from the police station right from under his lawyers' noses and kept incommunicado for nearly six days until he was released. On the same day Rizk was detained, 70 Muslim Brotherhood activists were also jailed for demonstrating in support of Gaza, but they were not released as quickly and their stories were nearly absent from the Western and even Arab media. I found out about Philip's arrest on Facebook on Sunday, when Sarah Carr updated her Facebook status to read 'Philip Rizk arrested.' A few hours later the story came in on the AFP wire. By then there was a Facebook group, which included an Amnesty letter writing campaign. Shortly thereafter friends set up a website in English and Arabic devoted to his release (Free Philip Rizk) and several activist bloggers had written about Rizk's arrest.[138]

The Facebook updates and the group started by Rizk's family provided journalists with the latest information about him and the tribulations of his family (whose house was broken into by police) and support of lawyers etc. Twitter messages from activist bloggers provided the latest updates, facilitating the jobs of journalists and thus making it more likely that amplification would occur. By this time it appeared cyberactivists had the process down to a science, activating their networks within hours, and effectively managing to broadcast their message to the international media, amplifying their voices and strengthening their ability to put pressure on the Egyptian government. By Monday the *New York Times*' had picked up the story along with other leading media outlets (Slackman 2009). Hardly any media, with the exception of my reports for Al Arabiya, mentioned the other arrests; the Muslim Brotherhood did not have the

[138] http://philiprizk.org/

same access to cyberactivist and journalistic networks in multiple languages that their activist counterparts had and thus were unable to activate amplifying or certifying mechanisms (Radsch and Awad 2009).

Double-edged Sword that Cuts Both Ways

But social media were also a double-edged sword for activists and the Egyptian public at large. Such campaigns that raised the profile of specific bloggers or cyberactivists could be harmful as well as helpful. Abbas acknowledged that publicity could be protective but also "hurt us to some extent because we became known to security forces and the public and we were no longer a vague journalist, it was easier when we weren't know" (Abbas 2008). On the other hand, as Gaber observed, the government also wanted to keep bloggers out of the media, which acted as a deterrent on arresting or torturing them as such actions would generate unwanted attention (Gaber 2008). Several bloggers said they would have been treated worse when they were arrested if not for their popularity and international recognition. The security services "are always afraid from someone like me, someone famous, someone with supporters outside and power of media to talk about him," explained Gemyhood in an interview.

Cyberactivism gave young Egyptians important tools for circumventing government dominance of the media sector and restrictive freedom of association laws that prohibit NGOs from operating or groups from gathering and thus help shift the balance of power away from authoritarian governments. But these media also facilitate state surveillance because of their public nature and most people lack of familiarity with basic security settings on their social profiles, much less digital encryption or counter-censorship tools.

For example, most Egyptians do not protect their Facebook profiles by restricting access to friends or networks only, meaning that those who joined the *We Are All Khaled Said* page or

anti-Mubarak pages (of which there are plenty) are very likely know to the regime. Egyptian Facebook users also tend to use the semi-private platform to make friends rather than to stay in touch with existing ones, as is more typical in the United States, for example. The lack of high privacy settings coupled with the extensiveness of networks among Egyptian activists means that it is relatively easy for the government to track developments and planning on Facebook. Twitter is a similarly open platform and is also extremely popular among digital activists, who link it to their blogs and Facebook pages and are followed by journalists. I do not know of any digital activists who restrict Tweets to only their followers -- this defeats the point of such services in any case. The use of Arabic and English by many of the more savvy activists is one example of the concerted effort to ensure the western world was getting their information.

Arrests Spur Amplification Among Ikhwan Bloggers

As discussed, prison and arrests played a pivotal role in expanding the blogosphere into a realm of contention and opposition to the regime and recruiting new bloggers. A series of arrests in 2007 that netted several key figures among the reformists and subsequent military tribunals in 2008 inspired several of the imprisoned men's children – both sons and daughters – to start individual and group blogs, with *Ensaa* being the most prominent among the latter.[139] The arrests and military tribunal expanded awareness about blogs and increased the ranks of bloggers, cyberactivists and citizen journalists in the Ikhwan but also those identifying themselves as Islamic. For several youth, it was the imprisonment of their fathers that prompted many of them to start blogging. This also helped ensure that activism remained a central articulation of the blogosphere's logic. Someya al-Batr, for example, started blogging in 2007 after her father, a Brotherhood member like herself and a professor of science at Cairo

[139] http://ensaa.blogspot.com

University, was arrested yet again. “I wanted to blog to send my message and vision to the world on recent events,” she explained in an interview. She described how her father had been arrested many times so she “started to blog to say we are still alive, we have family relations” (al-Batr 2008). Asmaa al-Erian, daughter of political bureau head and leading reformist Issam al-Erian, similarly started blogging to mark her presence and write about life with an imprisoned father as well as to protest and draw attention to his case (al-Erian 2008).

As Amr Magdi explained, such arrests increased the number of Islamic bloggers not just among the family of those detained, but among their friends and acquaintances. “If I knew a friend whose father was detained and she started a blog I would ask her about what’s blogging, I may start my own blog as well,” said Magdi in an interview. “A lot of sons and daughters of detained MB leaders started to develop their own blogs essentially to talk about their fathers who are in jail and to show social aspect of their parents but finally this led to Muslims becoming bloggers.” This viral networking also took place on Facebook as it grew in popularity during 2008 and onwards as a forum for blogging activism.

These blogs put a personal face on generic statistics about roundups and arrests and provided a post-millennial form of virtual isnad in which tracing authority and witnessing is performed through digital media and cyberactivists. When Omeyna’s husband, also a MB member, was arrested she used her blog as a platform for her eight-year-old son to communicate with his imprisoned father. “When my husband arrested my little son Ayman wrote a message on my blog to his father,” she said in a focus group, making him one of the youngest members of the blogosphere. As another blogger explained, blogging was a way to feel empowered in what often seemed to be a helpless situation amid the authoritarian security apparatus and the hegemonic state-owned media apparatus:

> A lot of Muslim Brotherhood are arrested, and at different times. To the media it's just a number, you know? Today 15 of the Brotherhood were arrested, and now 27, and 600, and so on. But if it was any other group or movement, if even one man was arrested, then it becomes 'he was arrested, he was tortured' and so on. And I believe this is because there is no human side to the Ikhwan. The Ikhwan character is just some character that appears in the media. In the election, or arrested. That's it. So the Ikhwani bloggers they showed a human side, the individual side, of Muslim Brotherhood members. The youth opinion maybe. (al-Sherkawey 2008)

Blogging gave the prisoners' children a feeling of empowerment in the face of an authoritarian state power. These psychosocial shifts in feeling able to at least do *something* had a cumulative effect, and set the groundwork for collective action.

Framing Torture: Normative Claims Making in the Public Sphere

Torture was a central issue for cyberactivists as were the arrests of bloggers, although these two issues often went hand-in-hand since being arrested often resulted in them being tortured. Although Egyptians may have known torture occurred, the mainstream media never discussed it, the subject was considered taboo, and the perpetrators were never held accountable. As I describe in this section, Egyptian cyberactivists "succeeded" in removing the taboos associated with this topic, raising awareness among the public about the extent of abuse, putting torture on the mainstream media agenda, and forcing the regime to hold at least some torturers accountable. Publicity became a form of protection in some cases, and gave voice to the voiceless.

The Torture in Egypt Blog

Cyberactivists across the political spectrum publicized torture inflicted by Egyptian police by posting videos and photos on their blogs and bringing the issue to the forefront of the public agenda. In 2006, for example, 24-year-old Noha Atef created the groundbreaking *Torture*

in Egypt blog, crossing a red line that put her in direct confrontation with the regime and its attempts to keep this topic off limits. The Mohandessin massacre inspired her to concentrate on blogging, so she focused on collecting everything she could related to the massacre of the Sudanese refugees: testimonies, photos, contact information, NGO and governmental statements, anything that might be useful in establishing accountability through the isnad she performed (Atef 2008). "I found I did something helpful: if someone was searching about the massacre they would find useful information," she explained. She said she wanted her blog to be "a point of reference for torture crimes in Egypt" and aimed to raise awareness among Egyptian youth. "That's why I blog in Arabic," she explained. "I want people to read this report and make people know that torture exists in Egypt; it's not isolated, it's systematic."

But initially, she said, "my little blog was not very well read," so in 2007 she decided she wanted to enlarge her "traffic rank." So she contacted Alaa and Amr Gharbeia, two bloggers she did not know personally but whose blogs she was familiar with. "They said it was very good that I made a blog on torture," she said in an interview. "Then they helped me create a better blog, which was not on Blogspot, then I started to learn how to use blogs, it was user friendly."

What started as an impassioned side project became a defining example of the power of blogs to set the public agenda, frame the torture debate, and hold political players to account by publicly documenting cases of torture and helping victims seek justice. She occasionally posted in English (though she said it took her twice as long to write) and included links to related sites in English, which would sometimes provide translations of her reports. Her blog became a source for journalists, both for news and as a reference, because of its extensive archive, said Atef, noting that she periodically tracked references to her blog is several Western newspapers.

Atef blogged at great personal risk and sacrifice, spending upwards of two hours a day on her blog for no remuneration and attracting unwanted attention from the security apparatus, which would call her home and tell her father to bring her in to headquarters. Yet she chose not to be anonymous, because she wanted the blog to be professional and people already knew she ran the blog. "In the beginning I thought that even if I faced same security problems I won't face serious problems because I rely on real sources, I don't fabricate anything. If I publish report by an NGO I just bring to the public, I don't fabricate it" she explained (Atef 2008). The idea that truth should be defense for freedom of speech was not a value codified in national legislation, but it was a value that carried symbolic power in the blogosphere.

But a year after she started *Torture in Egypt* she was fired from her job because of it, and shortly thereafter her father passed away. At his funeral she received another call from State Security, and continued to receive harassing phone calls and requests to "visit" their offices, which she refused. In fact, she fought back by turning the powers of surveillance on the state, documenting crimes by the police, following and reporting on the cases of victims of torture (many of whom came from rural communities and did not have the know-how to leverage cyberactivism for their own cases), posting censored films and videos about torture in Egypt, and curating features and articles about the issue from a range of sources.

Despite the hardship and danger posed by bringing such a contentious issue into the public sphere, Atef said she would not stop blogging "as long as we have torture and crime." The fulfillment she derived from freely expressing herself and enacting a form of citizenship that claimed the right to hold authorities accountable and give voice to the voiceless was apparently more powerful than economic or other forms of intimidation. "It makes me proud, practicing my right to freedom of expression," she said. Such sentiments were expressed by Egyptian youth

throughout the blogosphere, and standing up for the right to freely express oneself was a way making normative claims about what they wanted the public sphere to be like and generating an autonomous, sovereign space where it could emerge.

Normative Claims Making in the Blogosphere: The Case of Kareem Amer

Abdul Kareem Nabeel Suleiman was a 24-year-old law student at Al Azhar University, the oldest Islamic university in the world, when he became a symbol of the injustice of the Mubarak regime and the rights demanded by Egyptian youth. Kareem's case was a prime example of the normative claims bloggers made about their rights to freedom of expression and rejection of state control over the public sphere. It also reveals several tactical repertoires cyberactivists developed to The self-described "down to earth Law student" hoped to become a human rights lawyer and found his own firm to defend activists and protect the rights of Muslim and Arab women.[140] He began blogging in February 2004 under the pen name Kareem Amer, with his name, address and picture available for all to see.[141]

Kareem traversed red lines on his blog, including criticizing Islam and Christianity, assailing the Egyptian regime and the Muslim religion, and attacking his professors and Al Azhar, the oldest Islamic university in the world. In March 2006, he was subjected to disciplinary hearings at Al Azhar over critical posts he had written on his blog, which he not surprisingly chronicled on his blog, labeling the hearings an "inquisition" by a "repressive" institution.[142] Kareem wrote freely on hid blog about the disgust he felt for extremism in government and religion, equating them with terrorism, such as in one post where he wrote:

[140] Based on his profile description, available at http://www.blogger.com/profile/10055639386916201652

[141] http://karam903.blogspot.com/

[142] http://karam903.blogspot.com/2006/03/blog-post_17.html and http://karam903.blogspot.com/2006/03/blog-post_15.html

"I've realized the truth of the security forces' connivance with religious extremism in Egypt. I have learned well how the regime lives on this terrorism, that its existence is based on the existence of extremist groups, and the extremist university as well. This regime's disappearance is necessarily coupled with their disappearance."[143] According to one fellow blogger, Kareem would print out hard copies of his posts and distribute it, like a newspaper, to people walking down the street (Naje 2008). Although laws specific to Internet publishing were not yet in place at that time, Kareem's translation of electronic materials to hard copy printed materials meant he could be prosecuted under existing libel, defamation and blasphemy laws. Thus the Mubarak regime could invoke legal justification rather than physical violence and repression.

Kareem's first arrest came on October 25, 2005 after he posted an entry entitled "The naked truth about Islam as I saw it in Maharram Beh."[144] Three weeks later he was released, only to be arrested again on November 6. He was eventually tried and sentenced to four years in prison, one year for defaming the president and three years for disparaging Islam; the charge of broadcasting statements that could disturb the public order were dropped (ANHRI 2007). Kareem's arrest marked the first time a blogger was explicitly arrested because of the content of his writing rather than his activism in the streets. This fact became a mobilizing frame and galvanized bloggers who may not have been sympathetic to his views but were collectively in support of the right to freely express oneself. They activated the resources of transnational advocacy networks like Global Voices and human rights groups, which came to his defense. The blogger community's asabiyah, or social solidarity, not only provided access to resources of the

[143] http://karam903.blogspot.com/2006/05/blog-post.html

[144] http://karam903.blogspot.com/2005/10/blog-post_22.html

broader community but it simultaneously strengthened the moral strength they felt in the face of state repression and freedom of expression as a core value of the blogosphere.

Ijma', Asabiyah and the Tactical Advantage of Cyberactivism

Kareem received widespread support from fellow bloggers from across the political and religious spectrum that contributed to bloggers making claims about their right to freedom of expression and the development of a shared sense of injustice. Through the Free Kareem campaign, bloggers engaged in ijma', building consensus, around the fundamental *right* to freedom of expression even when it came to religion. The self-proclaimed "cynical, snarky, pro-US, secular, libertarian, disgruntled" blogger Sandmonkey came to his defense as did many Muslim Brotherhood bloggers "If there's not freedom there's nothing; freedom, not just expression. I am different from Kareem but I support him. Don't put him in prison," MB blogger Abdel Menem Mahmoud told me. "Our point of view was that maybe Kareem was mistaken, but at least you don't have the right to send him into jail," said another Islamist blogger, Amr Magdi, adding "we need more freedom of expression, not laws that limit freedom of expression." Manalaa's Bit Bucket featured the campaign and "Free Kareem" banners appeared on blogs throughout the Arab world and beyond, strengthening asabiyah and certifying Kareem as a symbol of free expression.

Nearly all the cyberactivists and bloggers interviewed expressed solidarity with Kareem on their blogs and in our discussions, though there was more ambiguity among Muslim Brotherhood and *salafi* bloggers. The vast majority, however, defended the right of people to write what they want. His case became a rallying cry for freedom of expression and mobilized a collective action campaign that transcended ideological divides and unified bloggers across the

sociopolitical spectrum. As young Egyptian bloggers negotiated their identities and engagement with causes in the blogosphere, they actively participated in ijma' around their fundamental right to freedom of expression, which in turn strengthened asabiyah in the Egyptian blogosphere and across other blogospheres.

Egyptian bloggers were highly organized in their campaign to free Kareem, deploying tools from the cyberactivist repertoire that effectively triggered amplification and agenda-setting mechanisms as well as international certification and asabiyah within the global blogosphere. Cyberactivists organized the Free Kareem Coalition, and launched an English-language website to aggregate information and updates, as well as to provide personal appeals and communications from Kareem. It integrated RSS feeds then Twitter and Facebook updates once those platforms started gaining popularity, accepted donations on Kareem's behalf, providing a central location for aggregating and curating the various advocacy initiatives underway on and offline, created online petitions that attracted signatures from around the world,[145] and framed the issue in a progressive and sympathetic way. The description of the coalition is illustrative, drawing on the norms of free expression and religious freedom and attempting to combat a frame dominant in some Western media that Muslims were intolerant of free speech:

> The **Free Kareem Coalition** is an interfaith alliance of young bloggers and college students committed to the principles of freedom of thought and freedom of speech.
>
> This campaign is our way of fighting to further the cause of brave people who continue to practice their right to freedom of expression even when such rights are not recognized. The creators and main supporters of the Free Kareem Coalition are Muslim, and we are doing this despite what Kareem said about our religion. Free speech doesn't mean "speech that you approve of." It includes criticism.
>
> You may be disgusted at what he said, even angered. That's okay, so are we! But we will defend with all our might his right to express such opinions, because it is his basic,

[145] see for example http://www.petitiononline.com/KAmer/petition.html

inalienable human right. We stand by and *fully* support Kareem through these difficult times and will continue working on this campaign until he is freed.[146]

The collective action frames developed through the blogs, comments, and videos in which young Muslims engaged in itjihad and developed ijma' on the issue of freedom of expression. Interestingly, some bloggers made a choice not to write about some of the dynamics in his case and the campaigns that sprung up, such as allegations of missing donation, because it could be perceived as being against Kareem and thus undermine the broader principles they were promoting (Naje 2008). And bloggers' opposition to Kareem's arrest was a powerful message to the Egyptian government and its autocratic neighbors that there was widespread support among the activist youth for freedom of expression as a fundamental right, even if the views expressed were repugnant or offensive.

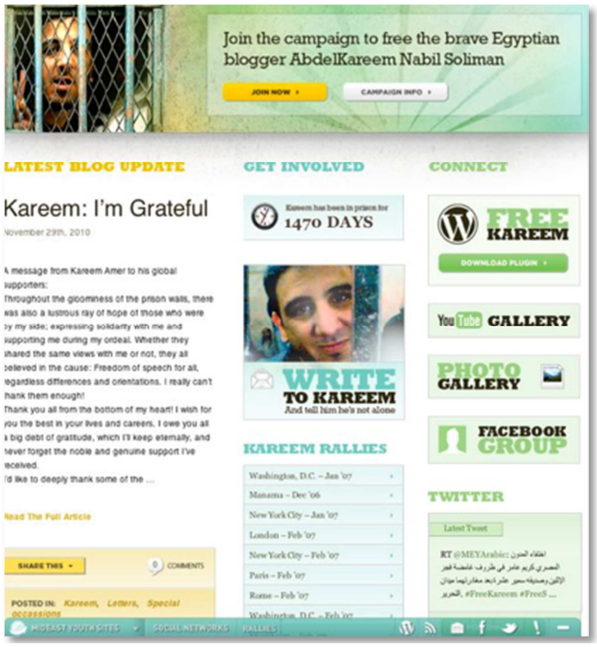

Figure 8 Screenshot of the Free Kareem website, which remained online after his release.

[146] http://www.freekareem.org/about/

It was also a clarion call to the West that many youth shared the same values and desires as their counterparts in more open societies. Free speech, it turned out, was the common denominator that connected bloggers of all stripes and trampling on that right put them all at risk. This focus in turn activated the certification mechanism by which bloggers, even those in the Muslim Brotherhood, were deemed free speech proponents. Kareem's case created a narrative around a shared sense of injustice and the claiming of the right to free speech, and propelled even more Egyptians to create blogs despite the risks. As one cyberactivist explained, "because we believe in freedom of speech, it's important to have more blogging – the blogosphere is only place all the people can talk without any administration" (Mustafa 2008).

The Certification-Amplification Cycle

By the next day, ANHRI had spoken out about his case. Several cyberactivists including Alaa Abdel Fattah, Dalia Ziada, Mina Zekri, Eman Herzallah, Malek Mustafa and others volunteered or worked with ANHRI, which positioned itself as a leading monitor and defender of freedom of expression, particularly on the Internet. The non-governmental organization (NGO) became a leading reference for journalists and NGOs around the world following developments on Internet freedom and regime response. ANHRI certified Kareem as a free speech martyr, validating his right to free speech and helping to articulate opposition to his arrest within the frame of Mubarak's assault on freedom of expression. A self-reinforcing cycle of certification-amplification resulted that helped ensure that Kareem's supporters won the framing contest.

Two days after Kareem's arrest the pan-Arab *Al Quds al Arabi* published a piece on detention followed the next day by a piece on the emerging worldwide activist network *Global*

Voices, which devoted significant editorial and translation resources to covering his case for several years. Reporters Without Borders issued a press release on his detention and an article appeared in the popular liberal Arabic website *Elaph*. By the end of January nearly every major media outlet in the English-speaking world and beyond had published articles about his case, including the BBC, CNN, the Associated Press, *Le Monde*, Al Jazeera and *The Guardian*, to name a few. Following Kareem's sentencing, *The Washington Post* editorial board weighed in on February 27 with an article entitled "Blogger on Ice" that framed Kareem as a "political prisoner" and castigated the Egyptian regime for its restrictions on free speech. Although Egyptian officials tried to fight back by claiming that media freedom and criticism of the president was rampant in Egypt, and that Kareem's case actually represented the workings of due process within the cultural constraints on acceptable speech (Haggag 2007). But the governments limited response, primarily confined to the letters to the editor sections of a few mainstream media outlets and the Arabic state-owned press, was subsumed by the tsunami of coverage online that framed Kareem's case in the way put forward by his supporters. The transnational elite media amplified the case and certified Kareem as an embattled free speech advocate and political prisoner, articulating the oppositional frame put forth by cyberactivists rather that that of the Mubarak regime.

Kareem became a cause célèbre of Internet freedom and freedom of expression, garnering mention in reports of every major human rights organization from Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) to Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House. In 2007, Index on Censorship bestowed its annual Freedom of Expression award on Kareem. Certification by these transnational activist organizations helped shift the political opportunity structure by making it clear that they would advocate on

behalf of besieged Egyptian bloggers and raising the stakes for Mubarak to arrest or detain others for invoking their right to free speech. It also bestowed his with symbolic power, ensuring that what he wrote from prison would be published and that when he was released from prison he would be invited to speak and attend conferences.

The Free Kareem campaign also succeeded in making his imprisonment into a foreign policy issue. For example, a bi-partisan letter by two members of the U.S. Congress demanding Kareem's release was the first of many high-level governmental interventions around the world, from Italy to Sweden to the United Nations.[147] The U.S. State Department expressed its concern and his case was mentioned in Egypt's Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations Human Rights Council. In 2009, the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published its opinion on Kareem's case, finding that his was arbitrary and in violation of international norms, in particular articles 9, 10 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Amnesty 2009; UN experts conclude blogger Kareem Amer is being arbitrarily detained 2009). Invoking the normative and legal support of these international bodies and treaties not only contextualized Kareem's case within an internationally agreed upon rights framework, but helped raise awareness across the wider Egyptian blogosphere about the existence of these rights and how to invoke international norms as part of their repertoires of contention.

Success or Failure?

The Free Kareem campaign was an example of sustained and concerted cyberactivism and underscores the difficulty of assessing success or failure. It also prompts the question of whether the hyper-reality of virtual contentious politics have a concrete reality, or whether they

[147] http://www.freekareem.org/2008/05/17/congressional-action-for-kareem/

are merely simulacrum in which the difference between image and the reality is no longer important, as Baudrillard suggests (2005). Despite the efforts of Egypt's most seasoned digital activists, a global online campaign that spanned continents and languages, global media attention and engagement on the issue, condemnation by Western governments, and the sustained engagement of human rights and journalist rights organizations, Kareem served his four-year prison sentence. He was not released early. The Egyptian government did not bend to international pressure. And the extensive mobilization in support of his cause did little to impact Kareem's imprisonment, although such certification may have helped prevent him from being treated more harshly, as is all too common in Egyptian prisons. A by-product of keeping Kareem in jail for four years was that the Egyptian government remained under scrutiny for its treatment of its citizens, and especially of cyberactivists and other human rights defenders. But this human rights/political repression frame likely would have been part of the dominant narrative even without Kareem's compelling story.

But the campaign succeeded in raising global awareness about the severe restrictions on free expression and religious freedom in Egypt. An analysis of press, NGO and governmental attention to Kareem's case compiled by the FreeKareem.org campaign shows that from the day of his arrest through mid-2008 there was sustained engagement on his case on a near weekly basis.[148] The claim to freedom of speech and framing of grievances as violations of this right helped validate this particular repertoire of contention domestically and abroad. This made the blogger-free speech claim-making routine available and recognizable even as it helped shape the 'blogger' identity as an oppositional one. Once articulated, this frame became dominant not only among citizen journalists but in the mainstream media, and even outside the country as well.

[148] http://www.freekareem.org/2008/07/06/kareem-timeline/

Thus what was once invisible was made visible via a circuitous route stretching beyond national boundaries and publics. And the digital detritus of the blogs, websites and other instantiations of cyberactivism created online remain, continuing to show up in search results and algorithms that contribute to their technological amplification. The campaign has also helped create an activist networked linked through and certified by key cyberactivists and NGOs. It provided several examples of how to get media, NGOs, governments, people and digital activists to rally around a common cause, exemplifying how cyberactivism that activates the mutually reinforcing mechanisms of amplification and certification can result in victorious framing contests. This attention likely helped prevent more serious violations of Kareem's safety and security and was instrumental in creating the psychosocial conditions that contributed to the emergence of a social movement, even if it failed to get Kareem out of jail.

Empowerment Through Free Expression

Why did these bloggers continue blogging despite the harassment, torture, and prison time they endured? Why did blogging become so popular among young Egyptians, but not among the business community, the media, government, or NDP or Mubarak supporters? Why were the first several years of the blogosphere's development dominated by young, relatively open-minded youth? So many of the young people I spoke with in Egypt and observed online expressed an innate need to express themselves freely. In Egypt, they lacked access to, and representation in, the mainstream media, and the public sphere was dominated by the older generation and the traditional hierarchies of Egyptian and Muslim cultures.

The Emad al-Kabir and Kareem incidents was just one among many, however, that bloggers sought justice for by highlighting through their blogs. Their focus on torture and other human rights abuses and the demonstrated ability to have the perpetrators brought to trial was a powerful message to the Egyptian public more broadly, and redefined the issue of torture as one of regime impunity to that of empowerment and unacceptability. Whereas people would never have dared to talk about torture in the past, following the Emad al-Kabir case they not only talked about it but they fought against it, taking cases to court and attempting to hold the Mubarak regime responsible in a visible contest to change the structural conditions under which it was somehow acceptable for the regime to torture its citizens.

As Abbas noted in a 2010 interview with BBC's Hardtalk, there was a marked rise in the number of ordinary citizens bringing cases of torture against the police through the criminal court system, which had never happened to such an extent before.[149] Coverage of torture by citizen journalists not only brought these cases to the fore but also served to educate people about their rights and give them hope that justice could be sought.

> It was a turning point for bloggers in a way that made us feel, yes, we can do something. We're not just a bunch of guys and girls writing on the Internet, and yes, the system is scared of us. They think we are powerful and can do something; the system gave us strength… I still feel powerful, very powerful, so many times I felt depressed but each time look at Emad's picture from the day of judgment – he was very happy, and I get transformed. (al-Omran 2008)

Torture was an issue that the resonated with the broader public and was a difficult one for the state or state-media to engage in framing contests with the bloggers on since there is really no good way to spin torture. Torture thus became an effective mobilizing frame but was also used against cyberactivists in an attempt to intimidate them. "In 2003 and 2006 I was tortured, but not 2007," Abdel Menem Mahmoud said, listing his arrests. "The security service asked me for two

[149] http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com/archive/2010/01/13/wael-abbas-on-bbc-hardtalk.html

hours about why I was writing a blog, why I wrote that I was tortured, they wanted to know what were bloggers, why was the West writing about me, writing about blogging in Egypt" (Mahmoud 2008). Abdel Menem's focus on human rights and torture, like many other bloggers, earned him the wrath of the security services.

Despite the pervasive surveillance of the state and the abuses several bloggers suffered at the hands of the security apparatus, the blogosphere was relatively free and open. Early adopter bloggers became early adopter social media users and these platforms also remained relatively open and free, becoming even more popular for short expressive burst of sharing and opining. These youth refused to give into the fear by which authoritarian states like Egypt control dissent. "We know that they monitor our blogs, record out telephone calls," explained Mina Zekri, a blogger and human rights researcher, in an interview. "The Minister of Interior said 'yes, we spy on phone calls and whoever is afraid let them not speak'." But not speaking was not acceptable to Egyptian youth. Statements like the one by a young female Muslim Brotherhood blogger was illustrative and common: "I'm not afraid. It doesn't matter. It's the idea of expressing yourself, I don't care about any restrictions or dangers I face. It's myself and I want to express what I want" (Israa 2008). In fact, overcoming the fear of speaking up and challenging the hegemony of the regime was an identifiable goal for many bloggers, who recognized that anyone who blogged, not just cyberactivists, would through their own practice overcome their fear and become an example to others. Blogging in and of itself was perceived as a social good, building asabiyah with fellow Egyptians and enacting citizenship through participation in the public sphere.

> It's important to have more blogging – the blogosphere is only place all the people can talk without any administration – you can't find this in a newspaper or in the media, and it's for free. And it doesn't take any talent, so any regular man from the street can do it. It's not only writing, it's drawing, taking pictures, so if you have talent or not, poor or rich, you can have a blog. Anyone can do it. It's good because then you know how other

people living and living their lives, read from Aswan, Tanta, anywhere in Egypt. (Mustafa 2008)

Or as another blogger put it as early as 2006, "What we're betting on is that more people will overcome the fear barrier and begin to challenge the emergency law."[150] The concept of peer-to-peer sharing and the circular circulation of information created asabiyah and reduced uncertainty, and thus explain why bloggers felt empowered by mobile phones with video cameras and why in some cases they successfully prevented harassment or were able to hold the perpetrators accountable (such as Nora Younis' posters, Emad al-Kabir, sexual harassment). One blogger recounted how bloggers started to wield cyberactivism as a weapon in individual confrontations with authorities: "I'm not afraid of police but worried about my parents, I'm not afraid from the police at all. I had a fight with a police officer, a big fight with yelling and shouting, and I threatened him with making video and he laughed, told me 'you are very brave to say something like that, you can go'" (al-Omran 2008). She recounted another story where a group of bloggers had just left the Emad al-Kabir trial and felt so empowered that when one of them almost got hit by a car he yelled "watch out I'm a blogger." These small, individualized incidents in which young Egyptians pushed back against the hegemonic state apparatus and confronted it on equal terms because they felt empowered by blogging and social media networks accumulated over several years, laying the groundwork for popular uprising.

The April 6 Movement

In mid-2008 there was a palpable political re-awakening as a new cohort of youth joined the blogosphere through social media like Facebook and Twitter, the proliferation of mobile

[150] Thank you to Rania Al Malky for sharing her interview transcripts from an interview she conducted in 2006 with Amr Ezzat.

phones continued unabated, and the media began to wake up to the political effects of blogging and cyber-activism. This re-awakening followed Mubarak's post-Hamas 2006 crackdown and subsequent lack of focus among cyberactivists who lacked a centralizing vision or mission as they had during the 2005-2006 demonstrations and Kefaya. April 2008 became a watershed moment in the region amid rising discontent and labor strikes over the prices of food.[151]

Figure 9 Photo of breadline in Aswan in May 2008. Photo by Courtney C. Radsch.

Throughout 2007 and 2008 there were hundreds of worker strikes around the country, chronicled in blogs that emerged specifically devoted to the issue, such as *Egyptian Workers* by Kareem El Beheiri (Egypt Workers)[152] and *Tadamon Masr* (Egyptian Solidarity)[153] and by Core bloggers Hossam el-Hamalawy and Mohammed Gaber, who became leading citizen journalists covering this beat. Hamalawy and Ganobi focused on leveraging social media in support of the

[151] http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/05/01/arabeyes-looming-food-crisis/

[152] http://egyworkers.blogspot.com/

[153] http://tadamonmasr.wordpress.com/

workers movement because of their interest in economic and political systems of exploitation and labor issues. Several of the leftist/socialist bloggers focused on giving workers logistical and media relations support, rather than leading demonstrations or strikes. This was a tactical move designed to protect the workers and their indigenous efforts from accusations by the government that they were being co-opted by cyberactivists and thus 'tainted' by association. These cyberactivists seemed to find renewed inspiration in the activism of workers and sympathetic university students to reenergize and unify their political activism. The workers at Kubra al-Mahalla, the largest textile factory in Egypt, had been holding strikes and demonstrations over several months, including a 10,000 strong strike on February 17 that turned into an anti-Mubarak demonstration with workers chanting "Down Down Hosni Mubarak" as they protested rising food prices.[154] In mid-March word started to spread that another strike in Mahalla was planned for April 6, 2008. The strike was called for two days before local council elections, which the MB announced it would boycott following its inability to get its candidates on the local slates despite previously saying it would participate.

But it was not they who called for a general strike in solidarity with the workers; it was a young human resources professional who was not a blogger and a young man who felt he had to do something to bring change (Abdel Fattah 2010). On March 22, 27-year-olds Esraa Rashid[155] and Ahmed Maher created the April 6 Day of Anger Facebook group, calling on people to stay home that day in solidarity with the Mahalla workers.[156] They called for Egypt's youth to express solidarity with the striking workers by staying home, wearing black, or taking other measures to

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[154] http://egyworkers.blogspot.com/2008/02/blog-post_17.html

[155] She changed her last name to Abdel Fattah after her marriage.

[156] http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=9973986703

show their support and bridge the divide between the working class and online social networks of youth and cyberactivists. Bloggers across the political spectrum amplified the call and organized coverage plans for the day of the strike in various locales throughout the country, from Cairo to Alexandria to Mahalla. "Come Muslims and Christians, Egypt won't change unless we are united hand in hand together for a better future," read the description of the group, followed by a list of rules for those wishing to participate online: no posting sectarian or divisive messages, no swearing or bad words, and no posting about personal matters or items that could be perceived as hurtful. Thus unlike blogs, which largely eschewed limits of free speech, the Facebook groups set out to create normative rules that would encourage cross-ideological asabiyah through imagining an alternative collective identity as progressive, united citizens. A few days later, I started to hear about the April 6 strike in conversations with activists at the Cairo Conference, and see links appear in my Facebook timeline. By April 2, the initial page had more than 54,000 members and several other group and event pages had been set up, including one event page that garnered more than 2000 RSVPs.[157] By the day of the strike it had gathered 70,000 members and commentators began referring to the newly active youth as the 'Facebook Party,' an impressive feat given that only 17 percent of the population was even online at this time (World Bank 2008).

The youth who joined the Facebook group were sympathetic with the plight of the 22 percent of their fellow citizens who lived in poverty, and joined the strike out of solidarity with the economic hardships brought on by rising bread prices and low wages, but it quickly took on a

[157] http://www.facebook.com/events/9105299833/ A Google news search for keywords and combinations of Egypt, Facebook, April 6 and strike between the dates March 22 and April 4 turned up no mainstream news articles in English, and only one news item from the activist blog Global Voices, a good indication that news spread via Facebook and interpersonal communication rather than through the media. One could potentially extrapolate as well that the majority of members were likely Egyptians.

life of its own (World Development Indicators 2008). Members joined the open group by the thousands and there were hundreds of wall posts each day leading up to the strike, meaning that thousands of people were willing to announce publicly, with their real names, that they supported this act of dissidence and defiance. Supporters were also disillusioned with limitations on their freedoms, including the fundamental freedoms of expression and of association, whether online or off, and clicking 'RSVP' or 'liking' the strike on Facebook was a way of showing support. This also sent a signal to their friends and social network. The response was broadcast on the walls and timelines of each person in their social network, so that a single click created a ripple effect throughout the network, exponentially increasing the diffusion of knowledge about the strike. Thus the amplification that occurred also had very high degrees of certification. The micro-act of liking the strike or virtually RSVPing was both a small act of defiance and a confirmation of collective grievances, helping to mobilize some and inspire others. Joining a Facebook group or retweeting a blog post therefore signaled preferences to friends or family, reduced information scarcity and encouraged others to make a similarly small, but nonetheless significant, act.

Group members also came up with ways to amplify their message and mobilize people who were not on Facebook or not online at all, demonstrating a keen awareness even then about the limits of cyberactivism to mobilize those on the other side of the digital divide. Some posted messages calling on each member to send text messages to their friends, other said they would talk about the strike in public spaces so that people not on Facebook would also know about the strike. Others posted advice for those planning to protest in the streets, urging people to keep their valuables at home, advising women to stay towards the back and away from police lines to avoid being sexually assaulted, and above all to remain peaceful. Egyptians living abroad joined

and promised to demonstrate in front of the Egyptian embassies in their respective host countries.

By this time the government had discovered Facebook. Mubarak supporters figured they could rally support around opposition to the planned strike and attempted to start their own social media campaign.[158] Blogger Gemyhood noted that anti-strike Facebook groups had sprouted and that an active campaign against the strike was being publicized on the popular social networking platform: "Suddenly you find a paid advertisement on the left of the Facebook site, which condemns rioting and disturbing Egypt's national security and calls for participating in a Facebook group against the idea of the strike and what happened during it of disturbance to Egypt's national security."[159] These pages, however, were far less popular and garnered far fewer supporters than the pro-strike pages. One Facebook page, for example, called "No to youth, no to riots that destroy the property of the people, do not tamper with the Egyptian national security" [Arabic] got a mere 1,000 followers, or not even two percent of the amount that the pro-strike group got. The Facebookers of 2008 were overwhelmingly young, connected, urbanites who found inspiration in opposition to the regime rather than fidelity to it.

Kefaya jumped on the strike bandwagon – in a move that some saw as the movement struggling to resurrect itself – as did a host of other organizations, including liberal MB offshoot party Al Wasat. The support of opposition parties and professional associations came with a long list of claims that were unfocused and irrelevant to the economic demands of the workers, muddling the collective action frame and putting a political imprint on the spontaneously created movement. This was clear in the joint statement by Kefaya, al-Karama, al-Wasat, the Labour

[158] See for example http://apps.facebook.com/group.php?gid=11562192083

[159] http://www.gemyhood.com/2008/04/blog-post_9472.html

Party, the Bar Association, the Educational Workers Movement, University Professors, Grain Mill Workers and the Ghazl al-Mahala workers, which called for people to stay home from work, even as Kefaya was also calling for a protests in Tahrir Square, and laid out a laundry list of complaints:

> All national forces in Egypt have agreed upon the 6th of April to be a public strike. On the 6th of April, stay home, do not go out; Don't go to work, don't go to the university, don't go to school, don't open your shop, don't open your pharmacy, don't go to the police station, don't go to the camp; We need salaries allowing us to live, we need to work, we want our children to get education, we need human transportation means, we want hospitals to get treatment, we want medicines for our children, we need just judiciary, we want security, we want freedom and dignity, we want apartments for youth; We don't want prices increase, we don't want favoritism, we don't want police in plain clothes, we don't want torture in police stations, we don't want corruption, we don't want bribes, we don't want detentions. Tell your friends not to go to work and ask them to join the strike.[160]

The Muslim Brotherhood was conspicuously absent from the milieu of supporters, a fact that problematized the collective action frame activists were trying to convey. The MB did not come out officially in support of the general strike, choosing to remain strategically on the sidelines but not taking a clear position. Oblique statements by senior leaders appeared to alternately condemn the protests or leave open the possibility of its members participating as individuals.[161] To the chagrin of MB's cyberactivists, who by then played a special if unofficial role in the organization because of their blogging activities as I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Six, the leadership refused to participate in the nationwide strike. The young Ikhwani bloggers protested the MB leadership's decision and called for a reversal, highlighting the generational divide within the organization and the different tactics they favored. Many Brotherhood bloggers were angry that the MB was not going to join the April 6 strike while

[160] http://arab-media.blogspot.com/2008/04/april-6th-general-strike-in-egypt-draws.html

[161] http://www.arabawy.org/2008/06/21/mahalla-testimony-6/

others wanted to have a clearer position from the leadership following contradictory statements from top leaders posted on the official website.[162]

Several MB citizen journalists like Abdel Menem Mahmoud and Abdulrahman Mansour nonetheless covered the April 6 strike and many MB bloggers were among those who called for another strike on May 4. AbdelRahman Ayyash, a young MB blogger, wondered on his blog why the Muslim Brotherhood did not actively support the strike.[163] Other young Muslim Brotherhood members interviewed also supported the strike and acknowledged that the MB bloggers did not understand why *per se* the leadership has not taken an active position to support the strike, prompting several to post scathing critiques of the leadership.[164] Of course one reason for the absence of official endorsement could be the fact that the MB had faced a severe crackdown on their leadership, with several leaders, especially those involved in the media, arrested, not to mention the general harassment faced by individual members. But it also reflected their strategy of remaining on the sidelines to see whether collective action was successful or not before throwing their weight behind it.

[162] Based on conversations with more than 25 Muslim Brotherhood bloggers about this in the lead up and aftermath of the April 6 strike.

[163] http://al-ghareeb.blogspot.com/2008/04/blog-post.html

[164] http://atebaabelahokook.blogspot.com/2008/03/blog-post_28.html

Figure 10 April 6 web banner found on blogs and Facebook.

The blogosphere was full of debate about the goals and effectiveness of a strike and whether people should bother taking to the streets, with seasoned activist bloggers like Negm, Sandmonkey and Mina Zekry expressing in interviews that they felt it would be futile to protest in the streets and simply invite arrests and detentions of activists, effectively taking them out of commission. Salem wrote a scathing critique of the strikers' demands, ending his March 24 post with "I am going to my job, and so should any of you with two cells of logic or reason in your heads!"[165] Although many of the Core bloggers supported the ideals, they often disagreed with the means, seeing street protests as futile and likely just to lead to arrest. The generational divide between the Core, activist bloggers and the Egyptian youth joining Facebook by the thousands to connect with friends was not so much one of age as one of experience. Despite the reticence on the part of disillusioned cyberactivists, many of them nonetheless contributed their efforts and expertise. On Saturday night I received a text message from Amr Gharbeia stating that the arrests had begun, and that blogger Malek Mustafa and three activists from the Islamist Labour Party

[165] http://www.sandmonkey.org/2008/03/24/the-6th-of-april-strike/

had been taken to the Masr al-Qadima police station because they were distributing fliers. A few minutes later I checked his site and found that there was already a blog post about the arrest, Alaa Abdel Fattah had posted about it on Twitter, and the lawyers had been mobilized. The unprecedented speed and capacity to organize and publicize collective action with an Internet-connected device was starkly evident, and threw into relief the limitations of a government response that did not utilize similar tools.

Government Response: Media Blackout and Arrests

The regime's response to the Facebook call to action revealed the regime's anxiety over the planned protest and gave significant meaning to Facebook and what youth were doing on it. State employees were required to show up to their jobs, students were threatened with expulsion, the American University of Cairo refused to cancel classes (even though many students were absent that day), and even the U.S. embassy in Cairo threatened to fire anyone who did not show up for work that Sunday.[166] Whereas many had previously just seen Facebook as a form of entertainment and diversion, there was in fact no hard line between the political and the social and the network dynamics of Facebook meant that micro-acts of asabiyah, such as liking a page, could become imbued with political importance. As one blogger astutely noted: "What makes the Egyptian regime mad is the fact that most of the people in Facebook who approved and supported the 6 April strike and the upcoming strike on the 4th of May are from the non-activist normal Egyptian average Joe who avoid involving in politics from near or far."[167] Facebook also underscored how the state media were merely an extension of Mubarak's regime.

[166] Based on the author's observations and discussions with several American diplomats prior to and on April 6, 2008.

[167] http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2008/05/down-with-facebook.html

The national press remained largely silent in the lead up, until just a couple of days before when threats and warnings by government officials garnered front-page coverage. The interior minister gave a televised speech in which he exhorted people to go to work and threatened to punish those who did not, while state-owned newspapers attempted to instill fear in those who would participate by detailing the punishments they would incur. But as one blogger observed: "They tried to make people afraid of staying home but they were more afraid of what would happen at street" (al-Omran 2008). The overt manipulation of the media provoked outrage from cyberactivists and citizen journalists, even among those who did not necessarily support the strike, as these posts by Sandmonkey and Zeinobia illustrate:

> Sandmonkey, April 6: [T]he government is going for an entire media blitz to stop the strike: The cover of government mouthpieces Al Ahram and Al Akhbar are filled with headlines that both deny the existence of any strike, following the line of "What strike? That's just a bunch of hype started by a number of illegal and shady movements and individuals who want to ruin the country!", and yet detail the amounts of legal punishment and trouble that anyone who participates in a strike would receive.[168]

> Zeinobia, May 2: Last week most, if not all, the official publications in the Arab Republic of Egypt opened their fire on the Facebook as a danger on the national security, [a] danger [to] our identity and [a] danger [to] our morals sending several indirect messages like calling for a ban and scaring the average Egyptian Joe from using it. Al Ahram weekly edition on Friday the 2nd of May 2008 published a whole page trashing "The Facebook" in the most worse week, using big language against those who use it from [the] youth; ironically it is not only youth who are using it.[169]

Mubarak undercut his own media strategy, however, by arresting the administrator of the Facebook page and other cyberactivists and strikers, amplifying rather than dampening their cause and helping them win the framing contest in the global media. Arrested activists and

[168] http://www.sandmonkey.org/2008/04/06/the-game-is-on/

[169] http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2008/05/down-with-facebook.html

journalists used networked ICTs to announce their arrests, offering information about police locations and organizing lawyers in advance of expected arrests.[170]

The administrators of the April 6 Facebook page, for example, posted their contact information, contact information for the lawyers who would provide emergency legal assistance, came up with slogans and conducted media outreach to both Egyptian and international media. On the one hand this helped certify and validate their calls for civil disobedience, but it also put them at risk because anyone could see that information, including the security agencies. Esraa Abdel Fattah was arrested the day before the strike and not heard from for 23 days, and Ahmed Maher was arrested afterwards and tortured. "I had no idea what April 6 would become when I started it," Esraa said, but added that so many people sent her messages the day before the strike asking if she had been arrested that she started to consider the possibility (2010). She gave her friend Maher her Facebook password and when the police did indeed arrest her she was only able to give then the old password. She had a message about her arrest that she wrote in advance and saved in her drafts folder on her mobile phone so she could send it out instantly if she were arrested.

Several other cyberactivists including Malek Mustafa[171] and Karim al-Beheiri,[172] were arrested, prompting an outcry and awareness raising campaign among bloggers and triggering amplification through the mainstream media. "[M]alek is in the police station with lawyers, let's hope they release him soon," Alaa Abdel Fattah tweeted to his hundreds of followers the day

[170] Description based upon participant observation conducted at that time in Cairo.

[171] http://malek-x.net/node/467

[172] http://tadamonmasr.wordpress.com/2008/04/08/البحـــي-كـــريم-ةالمحـل-مدون-تعـــذيب-وهام-عاجل/

before the strike.[173] The security forces were out in full force in Tahrir Square that day and threatened to arrest anyone who attempted to take pictures, as I discovered the hard way when a plainclothes policeman threatened me as I attempted to document the situation and snap pictures on my mobile phone. Esraa became a cause célèbre among the Core cyberactivists, even though she was relatively unknown prior to her arrest, as they deployed lawyers and other experience human rights activists to find where she had been taken. They also succeeded in getting the attention of the international media, which covered her case and adopted the frame put forth by the cyberactivists.

The attempt to manipulate the media and the arrest of Facebook users just underscored Mubarak's concern, and turned a strike about food prices and wages into an anti-regime demonstration. The police also alerted people to the fact that there was going to be a strike through their intimidation and questioning of ordinary citizens. "A lot of people will participate in it not only because know about it online and from Al Jazeera, but because police go and threaten them if they strike," explained Mustafa (2008). The government's response backfired as media censorship along with arrests of activists and politicians actually made the regime appear scared and precarious.

Citizen Journalism as an Activist Strategy

Amid a national media blackout, cyberactivists provided a critical information source to media and activists throughout the country. One way in which they coordinated framing was through a group blog 6 April 08 (in Arabic)[174] to gather information and submissions from cyberactivists throughout the country and provide information about legal assistance, link up

[173] https://twitter.com/#!/alaa/statuses/783497170

[174] http://6april08.blogspot.com/

protesters with human rights groups and lawyers to provide support to those who might be arrested, help recruit other lawyers,[175] and set up email addresses and phone numbers to compliment their social media accounts and ensure people had as many ways as possible to connect. On the day of the strike there were more than 300 wall posts. The photo-sharing site Flikr helped activists get pictures out immediately to the blogs and the mainstream media, domestic and foreign, feeding the 24-hour news cycle. A contingent of Core cyberactivists and citizen journalists drove up to Mahalla to document the labor protest and the bloody confrontation between striking workers and state security and police forces that broke out when the later fired on protesters. Bloggers posted pictures of crowds tearing down posters of Mubarak and stepping on them, an unheard of action that spread through the blogosphere like wildfire. One such post on Manalaa.net drew more than 40,000 views.[176] Spreading photos and video of the protests and police action not only confronted the regime's attempts to control the media narrative, it transformed the meaning of wearing black or staying home on April 6 into a statement of support for political change and showing people that their fellow citizens were no longer afraid.

Cyberactivists in Cairo, Alexandria, Mahalla and elsewhere used the Facebook page and posted videos to YouTube and Flikr to ensure that information and images of the violence in Mahalla and the police presence in Cairo were documented and verifiable. These citizen journalists provided an unfiltered view of the violence and security force crackdown, including interviews with the mother of a nine-year old shot in the head. Using their mobile phones and digital cameras they created a virtual real-time newsroom via Twitter and their blogs, posting

[175] http://6april08.blogspot.com/2008/04/blog-post_1921.html

[176] http://manalaa.net/node/87357

updates from the field and acting as a critical information link for the international press. The group blog 6 April 08 functioned as a collaborative newsroom where observers could submit photos, reports and video to a cadre of citizen journalists who would publish on the aggregator and YouTube. This provided a centralized informational platform for activists as well as journalists, and enabled individuals whose blogs or Twitter accounts might not have significant followings to reach a broader audience. Others stayed in Cairo to provide roving coverage of any potential street confrontation with the legions of security forces that lined the major streets and squares. Hamalawy's blog was, as usual, a central information node about the labor strike, as were Manalaa's Bit Bucket[177] and a host of others. Though not present himself, Hamalawy's established citizen journalist credentials and networks among the labor movement and media made his various social media platforms among the most robust of the day. Although he was in Berkeley, CA at the time and he played an important transmission and certification role. In the months that followed he posted dozens of videos,[178] portraits, and meticulously detailed follow up including the arrests of labor strikers, their court referrals,[179] and anniversary protests in one of the most in-depth examples of *isnad*. The independent and English language press used the content created by bloggers in their coverage. The *Daily News Egypt*, for example, quoted a blog on its front page, in a sign that blogs had become legitimate information sources in Egypt just as they had elsewhere (Carr 2008). Cyberactivists succeeded in agenda-setting and disseminating their framing of the strike through Egypt's oppositional and independent newspapers, counteracting the state's attempts to manipulate the state-affiliated media. *Al Badeel* ran dense

[177] http://www.manalaa.net/general_strike

[178] see for example http://www.arabawy.org/2008/06/28/the-mahalla-uprising/

[179] http://www.arabawy.org/2008/06/25/mahalla-documents/

coverage of the strike and its ramifications and provided extensive coverage of cyberactivism and the blogosphere, as did the more established *Al Masry Al Youm* and *Al Destor*.

This was the first time the mobile blogging service Twitter was used on a significant scale by cyberactivists and quickly became an integral part of their tactical repertoire. Using hashtags to coordinate joint conversations and action, and levering the immediacy of the networked broadcast platform, cyberactivists were able to coordinate on-the-go and in real time, including advising each other on areas to avoid because of security force presence or violence, areas that needed coverage, and cases of activists and others who needed help. It underscored the facility of mobile micro-blogging for coordinating collective action, responding to developments in real-time and adapting strategies accordingly as well as posting updates via mobile phone while following others in the cyberactivist network. Twitter also provided strategic linkages with media outlets and journalists and overcame the problem of the cost of sending mass numbers of text messages and proactively collecting mobile phone numbers. Cyberactivists used SMS and Twitter to send updates on the violence, imprisonment and State Security locations to their networks of journalists, bloggers and human rights activists. The microblog Twitter became a powerful citizen tool in the face of a repressive regime as a critical mass signed onto the site, merging the publishing potential of blogs with the distribution possibilities of text messaging. Thousands of people worldwide, including human rights organizations, government officials and other bloggers followed the minute-by-minute accounts of cyberactivists while others created Facebook groups and published updates. The instantaneous transmission of a single SMS message to hundreds of people coupled with direct photo uploading to Facebook, Twitter and Flikr helped make mobile blogging more common in the wake of April 6. Egypt's story offered

inspiration to activists around the world, but also provided a cautionary tale about the importance of linking cyberactivism with good old-fashioned grassroots organizing.

Success or Failure?

Whether the strike was a success or not depended on who was asked. But most agreed that it was practice for later and not meant to be the endgame. The blogosphere was humming with discussions about the "Day of Rage" coming in the future, about this being practice for the "long revolution." Some activists, inspired by what they saw as the success of April 6, called for another General Strike on May 4 to coincide with Mubarak's birthday.[180]

Esraa's friend Maher, also a former member of the Ghad Party and the Youth Movement for Change, took over administration of the Facebook page following Esraa's arrest and publicized calls for May 4 strike. He had been an activist since the 2006 Judges Club protests and one of the new generation of cyberactivists who relied primarily of Facebook's social networking capabilities to organize politically. He, too, was arrested and was tortured while in custody as authorities demanded Maher give them the password to the Facebook group and tell them the real names of those who participated.

The absurdity of these requests, given that the group did not require a password to access and Facebook's real name requirement meant that most people who joined the group did so with their true names, underscored how little the regime understood how these platforms worked. Abbas reported on the abuse in a post entitled "The Newest Egyptian Method to Find Out Your Facebook's Account Password," meticulously documenting Maher's injuries and torn clothing. Despite the horrible experience Maher suffered, the anecdote about being tortured for a Facebook password that did not exist became a joke about the incompetence and brutality of the

[180] http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=14667406431

Mubarak regime, undermining the fear and intimidation of a security apparatus that could not understand the very basics of how the social networking platform worked. This small act of citizen journalism was a form of resistance and became a story that could be shared and circulated among the broader public because of the networked nature of the new public sphere.

The April 6 activists were strategic and committed to a struggle, asking why they should *not* talk about changing the whole system – the constitution, the government, people's sociopolitical habits. To paraphrase a September 29, 2008 post: People want to change, but there's no reason to make small changes, the whole thing needs to be changed, the entire package, we're not talking about hanging a person but changing the whole system- the constitution, the government and ministries, the judicial system, and change people's habits where they think that the way they are cannot be changed or fixed. These calls for radical, revolutionary change were preceded by a demand to know where the thousands who were on the streets for the Iraq war and hundreds from Kefaya's apex in 2005 had gone. "So how are we going to get to a million person demonstration? People are scared to follow someone they don't know if they can trust, they're afraid to go into the street. You have to connect people and connect the revolution of freedom with the revolution of bread." Such broad calls for revolutionary change were missing elsewhere in the Arab blogosphere, however, although there was certainly a recognition that successful initiatives depended on bridging the digital divide.

Figure 11 Ahmed Maher's injuries as documented by Wael Abbas and posted on Misr Digital. Used with permission.

Seasoned activists and bloggers thought May 4 was too soon for another strike and would dilute the power of a general strike in the future. Ikhwani bloggers were influential enough to provoke a stronger if somewhat ambiguous endorsement from the MB leadership of the May 4 strike called for by a new generation of cyberactivists who used Facebook as their entré into activism.

> The youth were angry that the Muslim Brotherhood didn't participate in April 6. So it did on May 4. There were also youth who didn't have blogs, and they had a lot of power (after 6 April). The leaders were angry about this, and Morsi tried to meet youth bloggers and tried change their mind, but he didn't succeed. Rashad al Bayumi at IslamOnline wrote a bad article about bloggers. Mahmoud Ezzat discussed the issue and spoke with some bloggers, urging them to go against the other bloggers. But the ones he spoke with were not famous. (Mahmoud 2008)

Although the Muslim Brotherhood said its members would participate that time around, the strike never got out of the ether of cyberspace. The day of action largely came and went with little activity and certainly nothing approaching the events of April 6, and by then many activists within and outside the MB appeared to have decided the time was not ripe for street protests.

According to Malek Mustafa, "6 April succeed because lots of things, workers in Alex, Cairo, Aswan, Mahalla, went on strike, it wasn't only Facebook," whereas the May 4 strike was "only on FB" and was "too fucking soon, everyone is exhausted after April 6" (2008).

Mubarak's regime had also learned from the experience a month before, and appeared willing to block access to key tools in the cyberactivist tactical repertoire: mobile tweeting appeared to be blocked on the state-owned Egypt Telecom,[181] mobile phone companies were directed to block text-messaging and voice services for anonymous users, the government considered blocking access to Facebook, and the government filed charges against a broadcaster that had disseminated images of protesters tearing down a portrait of President Mubarak (El-Ghitany 2008; Knickmeyer 2008).

And of course detention of cyberactivists remained an option, but there was also at least some recognition that the government had limited means to effectively deal with protesters because of the amplification and certification mechanisms its repressive actions triggered on the behalf of the young cyberactivists. The state-owned *Al Ahram Weekly*, for example, interviewed several experts (including ones at the state-affiliated al-Ahram Centre for Strategic and Political Studies) who all said that blocking Facebook or other websites, arresting users or other "security-oriented step[s] is not only destined to fail but may have drastic repercussions" including emphasizing the state's weakness and inability to confront the digital era (El-Ghitany 2008). Just as the state had failed to proactively engage with or influence the blogosphere, it failed to understand the power of new social networking platforms, underscoring he generational divide between regime supporters and the youth of the country. "What is interesting is that the old generations that [are] currently heading the regime and interior ministry do not understand the

[181] Based on the author's personal experience.

Facebook and its mechanism just like blogging at first," wrote Zeinobia in a post entitled "Down with Facebook."[182]

April 6 inspired others to demand change and become politically active using social media tools that were becoming increasingly popular in Egypt. A page called Facebookist Movement to Overthrow Mubarak was one example, and from then on protest movements throughout the region made use of the social networking platform to build support and awareness.[183] In the wake of April 6 and May 4, cyberactivists tried frame the strike as a success, defining the situation as one of practice for the future and preserving the possibility of working together. These April 6 activists were strategic and committed to a struggle, asking via their blog and Facebook pages why to bother making small changes when the entire package needed to be changed. Indeed, they started asking why they should *not* talk about changing the whole system – the constitution, the government, people's sociopolitical habits, as in this post from the April 6 Youth Movement Facebook page:

> People want to change, but there's no reason to make small changes, the whole thing needs to be changed, the entire package, we're not talking about hanging a person but changing the whole system- the constitution, the government and ministries, punishments and change people's habits where they think that the way they are cannot be changed or fixed.[184]

These calls for radical, revolutionary change from a post on September 27, 2008 were preceded by a demand to know where the thousands who were on the streets for the Iraq war and Kefaya's apex in 2005 had gone. "So how are we going to get to a million person demonstration? People are scared to follow someone they don't know if they can trust, they're afraid to go into

[182] http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2008/05/down-with-facebook.html

[183] http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=11913159095

[184] September 27, 2008 Facebook update

the street. You have to connect people and connect the revolution of freedom with the revolution of bread."

The next year, on the eve of the one year anniversary of the April 6 Youth Movement, Abdul Halim Kandil called for a day of rage (the same term that would be used in 2011) to protest against Mubarak and lift the veil of fear.[185] He discussed how originally they were going to call for Kefaya and opposition/banned parties to join in a General Strike, the call from the first year, but instead they called it a Day of Rage. Again they wrote that this was not just a protest to mark the anniversary but rather planning for the future, for more protests until the day of the 2010 parliamentary elections. "Egypt will not be the same by the end of 2011," he wrote, noting that a fuse had been lit and the regime was delusional and falling apart, and perhaps would not even last until the election.

These online debates and street protests opened up fundamental questions about what type of political system Egypt should have, further weakening the status quo. "Openly debating who should rule the country and how they obtain this power is now a defining feature of the political landscape," as anonymous Baheyya put it on her blog post from August 15, 2009. In the post she blamed "change-hating Mubarak" for making "everything up for debate." She similarly saw the current political contestation as part of a longer movement. "This does not mean that Egypt's citizens are on the cusp of choosing who rules them. Not soon and not for some time to come, alas." That time would be January 25, 2011. Egypt's first April 6 General Strike exemplified the convergence of new media platforms and political activism but also the necessity of linking online movements to offline organizing. What started as a workers strike in Mahalla burgeoned into a nationwide movement, propelled by popular discontent with

[185] March 31, 2009 Facebook page update.

skyrocketing inflation. Bloggers wrote that the strike was practice for the "long revolution." Although cyberactivists failed to mobilize the broader public into the streets for the April 6, 2008 Facebook strike because they lacked a clear definition of the claim they were making and the injustice they were articulating, it got people talking and marked a critical convergence point in the use of all the various blogging and social media platforms, proving that indeed cyberactivists could activate support beyond their social networks. At stake in the political struggles in Egypt was the "capacity to impose a way of seeing the world," which could inspire and mobilize a generation (Bourdieu 1998, 21).

The Egyptian Facebook strike inspired Arab youth throughout the region, with solidarity strikes being called for by cyberactivists in Jordan and a special coverage page on Global Voices.[186] "It is a protest against the situation in the country in general and in solidarity with a similar strike being held in Egypt on the same day," the blogger at Jordanian Issues wrote in a post.[187] Another blogger, Ibrahim Safa wrote on Al Jazeera Talk *that* the call for a solidarity strike "has triggered a call for strikes across the region against increasing prices in the Arab world,"[188] with another adding "[t]he reason is to send a message that the people of Jordan are not able to withstand more."[189] Yet there was very little discussion in Jordan about upending the system, as blame more often lays with the government not the royal family. In fact just two months later the king gave a wide-ranging, detailed interview addressing economic issues and criticism, and even left a comment on a blog, thought to be the first time a royal monarch directly

[186] http://globalvoicesonline.org/specialcoverage/2008-special-coverage/egypt-general-strike-2008/

[187] http://jordanianissues.blogspot.com/2008/04/blog-post_21.html

[188] http://www.aljazeeratalk.net/portal/content/view/2599/8/

[189] http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/05/03/jordan-gearing-up-for-strike/

interacted on a blog.[190] This action garnered him significant good will, yet there is no evidence to suggest Mubarak ever directly interacted with his cyberactivist citizens. Other countries also covered the Egyptian blogosphere, such as Kuwait, where a newspaper inaugurated its blog coverage with an interview with Sandmonkey (also prompting dismay from Kuwaiti blogger).[191] And efforts to organize and collectivize Arab bloggers resulted in the first Arab Bloggers Meeting in Beirut, a self-organized organic conference where they set the agenda and held training for each other.

Over the next two-and-a-half years the April 6 Movement grew to become the leading youth movement in the country. The April 6 strike helped increase public knowledge about blogging and social networking, propelled Facebook into the primary social network among Egyptians, making it more valuable as more people joined, and branded these new platforms as oppositional realms of contention (Barabási 2003; Shirky 2008). "The Facebook now is the official enemy of state. The blogs are no longer the danger on the State but it is the Facebook," Zeinobia wrote on her blog, "Facebook is the new black now in the Egyptian society," and not just among youth.[192] And as Younis observed in a blog post about the strike for Global Voices, many of these Egyptians in cyberaspace were unhappy with the status quo:

> More people are joining the blogsphere (*sic*), Facebook, and Twitter by the hour… There is a techie, passionate, frustrated generation now on the playground….and one could only expect more to come. In few years time there will be no need for registration of political parties. Like-minded people will organise and will be heard.[193]

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[190] http://www.black-iris.com/2008/07/02/candid-interview-king-abdullah-tackles-the-latest-controversial-issues-in-jordan/#comment-121666

[191] http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/07/17/kuwait-blogs-in-the-news/.

[192] http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2008/05/down-with-facebook.html

[193] http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/04/30/egypt-facebooking-the-struggle/

Other bloggers noted that the strike and its repercussions "sure hit a nerve, with thousands of people mobilizing themselves and freely available online tools to demand their freedom, equality, democracy and an honourable life for themselves and the future generations of Egypt."[194] Articulating these demands publicly and in one's own name undermined the state's hegemony and cumulatively amounted to a massive symbolic protest against the Mubarak regime. The blogosphere revealed a seismic shift underway in public expectations and acceptance of the status quo. And as this network continued to grow it became more powerful, developing the potential to become a structuring force over the configuration of political power in Egypt (Castells 2004).

We Are All Khaled Said

On June 6, 2010, a 28-year old young man named Khaled Said was pulled out of an Internet café in Alexandria by police and violently beaten to death in front of bystanders. The attack on the average looking, middle-class Said took place in public Reports that he had posted a video online showing police dividing up seized drugs At the morgue, his 14-year-old brother Ahmed took a picture of brother's shattered face on his mobile phone and shared it online. On June 10, cyberactivist supporters created a Facebook page *Kulna Khaled Said* (We Are All Khaled Said) and nearly 60,000 people joined it within the first 24 hours after it was created. It had more than 400,000 fans by the end of 2010, and more than one million by the time the uprising got underway.[195] Over the next several months cyberactivists organized flashmobs in support of Said and against police violence that were designed to bypass legal restrictions on

[194] http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/04/07/egypt-a-wake-up-strike/

[195] https://www.facebook.com/ElShaheeed

public gatherings but nonetheless to make a statement. They posted videos of the protests and aggregated content on the Facebook page and a website devoted to Said, including incident of police violence against the peaceful demonstrations.[196] The flashmobs would gather supporters to stand in silence, read a book, or dress in black, essentially defying the legal strictures because it was not clear under what rubric such collective action fell, and provided powerful evidence of repression when police reacted violently against people who were simply standing around reading.

Figure 12 Khaled Said before and after his death in a banner posted on blogs and a photo taken by his brother at the mortuary that circulated widely in the blogosphere amid calls for action.

Dynamics

Blogging was an intensely personal, yet often political, act. And as the blogosphere developed it became a field of power, in which particular practices were acceptable and deemed as constitutive of the blogosphere while others were not. For example, the community appears to

[196] For example http://www.elshaheeed.co.uk and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLE6TXSPaEY

view receiving payment, direction, or sponsorship for blogging as antithetical to the values of the blogosphere. Similarly, freedom of expression was constitutive of and comprised the normative framework for this field, restrictions on this freedom were shunned and could decertify someone as a blogger and thus problemetize their ability to invoke this identity. Not only that, but restrictions on free expression, such as arrest, could spur the community to action and thus strengthened this norm as constitutive of the blogosphere, as the cases of Alaa, Abdel Monem, Amer, and so many others did.

The blogosphere was a field of practice where personalization and independence were valued and sponsorship, corporatization and institutionalization was suspect. Bloggers specifically eschewed labels and efforts at organization, viewing themselves as individuals who could choose or not choose to support a specific cause. Thus it was somewhat counterintuitive that a movement developed from this space and through the practices of the blogosphere, although perhaps not so surprising given that the blogosphere developed as a field in relation to the political field. Indeed, politics often served as the impetus for the first blog post even among those who primarily use their blog as a personal diary. For example, Isis, an anonymous woman who had been blogging (in English) since early 2006, wrote about Washington policy towards Iran and other related foreign policy issues in the first post on her predominantly personal blog, in which she typically discussed her life as a former drug addict and her thoughts on issue of the day.[197] There were also personal blogs featuring lists of favorites, silly poems and cute pictures. But regardless of topic, they overwhelmingly described the content of their blog as personal and describe blogging as a personal and private activity. The individuality norm of blogging also helps explain why there were few businesses or institutions present in the blogosphere for the

[197] http://egyptreality.blogspot.com

first several years, when the normative community was strongest. This is not necessarily a given, as other national studies have indicated.

Bloggers resoundingly eschew the term organization and community, disavow labels, and revile against monetary gain from or sponsorship of their blogs. The refrain I heard over and over again is that they needed to express themselves and have their ideas heard. This expression was dialogic, with commenting on other blogs seen as a "duty" of blogging and giving rise to communication flows that contributed to creating a participatory public sphere. And because they lacked alternatives i.e. a free media, they turn to blogs. MB members especially said the needed to express themselves and their goals because they could not in the mainstream media or even within their homes, since their parents may not have been members or might be scared of even talking about the MB. This need to express oneself and desire for discussion (via comments) is one of the most interesting thing about bloggers across the political/religious spectrum. Many claimed their blog as a personal oasis of freedom, a place to discuss "personal" issues much more than "political" ones (their distinction) especially if they worked in journalism. Yet the personal and political are intertwined in authoritarian and conservative states like Egypt, and as I have shown, the distinction between the two was often blurred.

Thus despite being a personal activity that was publicly private, blogging created a new public sphere, the blogosphere, and thus opened up new venues for collective agency, self-determination and the active shaping of a community through communication. This new public sphere was a venue where sociopolitical hierarchies and norms were made and broken through the performances and practices people engaged in and the stories they told about the blogosphere and the development of the Egyptian youth movement (Gambetti 2009, 92-94). The flow of communication and the power of public discourse in the blogosphere created this arena as a

sovereign public sphere in which relevant topics were raised, norms and values interpreted, and problems resolved (Habermas 1992, Goldfarb 2006).

Diffusion of Innovation

Throughout the early years of the blogosphere and cyberactivism, Core bloggers played a central role not only in raising awareness about blogging but also in building asabiyah among youth across the religiopolitical divide. Diffusion of innovation theory, which emphasizes the function of opinion leaders in creating knowledge of new practices and ideas and the persuasive role they play in encouraging other to adopt exogenously introduced innovations, helps explain how and why a few people had such a profound influence (Melkote 2006; Rogers and Shoemaker 1971). Such diffusion happens through "key domestic elite innovators" who create social networks through which innovation travels and is amplified (Wilson 2004). The Core bloggers adopted and adapted new technologies created in the West to domestic political and technological conditions in their society, amplifying the impact and usage of those technologies domestically. These bloggers also tended to be interested in communicating across ideological lines, meaning that they created cross-ideological networks. Sherif Ahmed, for example, was an interfaith activist who said the Salafi and jihadi bloggers regularly read his blog, even though they were likely to disagree with most of what he wrote, but that the opportunity for commenting enabled genuine communication in the blogosphere (Ahmed 2008). The technological properties and power laws of the Internet and social media networks also reinforced the role of these Core bloggers, who became key nodes in the network.

Wael Abbas and Amr Gharbeia, for example, were early adopters who became hubs that received enormous amounts of media attention and consistently ranked among the most influential Egyptian blogs, while Abdel Monem Mahmoud, for example, was a significant hub of

the Muslim Brotherhood network. As I noted in Chapter One, the dynamics of network growth mean that early and more highly linked nodes will grow faster and be linked to more often by new nodes and thus grow faster then younger and less connected users (Barabási 2003). This is why the Core bloggers continued to act as a focal point, the key nodes in the network of the Egyptian blogosphere, because as long as they remain active they continue to garner the most links and the most press coverage, which reinforced their role as the key nodes.

These early bloggers multiplied the ranks of activist bloggers by teaching each other how to start a blog, how to post photos, and encouraging newcomers to try blogging (Zeinab 2008). Core bloggers walked other youth through how to create an account, design the layout and post entries, include photos and videos, and often continued to encourage bloggers who became cyberactivists. "They called us 'the old guardians'" said Ahmed Naje about the core group that helped hundreds of fellow Egyptian youth create blogs (2008).[198] Thus from the outset of the development of the Egyptian blogosphere there was an activist element to blogging.

Furthermore, since most of these early bloggers were cyberactivists and/or citizen journalists, they accounted for the vast majority of the activity and press attention by the end of the decade. Thus the early Core bloggers who continued to blog remained influential even as the blogosphere expanded, diversified, and lost it center. As more Egyptians started blogging the blogosphere transformed into a network of identity communities linked in a cyberspace by virtue of their Egyptianness. Young bloggers from the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, created a space in the Egyptian blogosphere as I discuss in the next Chapter, as did Bahai, Islamists, and other religious groups.

[198] Other bloggers refer to them as the "godfathers of blogging" and nearly all were men although there were certainly some female bloggers at this time as well.

Thus liberal, activist bloggers remain disproportionately influential, and their blogs were often held up as examples of why people blog. And despite the myriad of blog types, the fact remained that Egypt's blogosphere was distinct from its regional counterparts, where the majority of blogs were personal (Etling et al. 2009; Ikhwanweb 2007; Lynch 2007a). "In most of other Arab countries blogs are personal not activist, Egypt is exceptional," explained on cyberactivist (Mahmoud 2008). In post-millennial Egypt, blogging became a necessity for staying up to date with activists and demonstrations, and *being* an activist (Gaber 2008).

Most Egyptians who were not part of the blogosphere in the mid-2000s primarily heard about blogging through their friends or via the mainstream media. If via the later, they most likely heard about one or more of the Core bloggers and would link to them in their blogrolls as a form of self-certification and identification with the Egyptian blogosphere.

Because of the diffusion pattern described above, as well as the initial oppositional nature of the Egyptian blogosphere, it was dominated by the younger generation, and there were few mainstream media outlets, local businesses, or government representatives present. The generational divide in the blogosphere meant that young Egyptians dominated this space, and that many parents were fearful about their sons and daughters blogging. Older people were often hesitant to speak out and felt that there was little they could do to change the situation they were in, whereas the younger Internet-savvy generation felt more empowered to create change. There was no generational gap in their grievances, only in their response and the belief that things could change. The youth who found their voices through blogging and expressed themselves on Facebook and via Twitter were also reticent to do so secretly, which is why so many bloggers eschewed anonymity despite the risk of arrest and harassment outlined in the previous chapter.

Despite the arrests and targeting of bloggers and in particular cyberactivists, the blogosphere continued to expand and more youth became cyberactivists. Claiming the right to freedom of speech and association was central to the development and expansion of the blogosphere, and doing so in one's own name was an important way of claiming this right. Publicity was a key mechanism of contention throughout nearly the entire blogosphere, for it represented an act of defiance against a regime that would silence its critics and resistance against social norms that would mandate certain topics or identities as inappropriate or confined only to the private sphere. Organizing protests at the press, lawyers or judges syndicate to draw attention to issues, particularly related to freedom of speech and legal frameworks, become one of the claims-making routines bloggers routinely engaged in as part of their repertoires of contention. Such protests also provided an opportunity for cyberactivists to connect with other interested groups, such as journalists, lawyers and judges, and for citizen journalists to identify and be identified with their professional counterparts. Cyberactivists paid a heavy price for their embodied activism, for only when they were physically present could they be arrested. These protests were struggles to gain political rights from the regime or prevent them from taking them away, but were also important symbolic opportunities to build *asabiyah* and coalitions across virtual and embodied groups and grab public attention. As the previous episodes of contention demonstrated, activists often had to negotiate meaning, framing and tactics as the protests or arrests occurred. It also revealed how the regime was well aware of the power of images to frame and inflame and actively sought to prevent activists from taking photos and video. Yet despite the threats, few cyberactivists chose anonymity. Counter intuitively, the crackdown on fellow bloggers only seemed to inspire and madden them.

Anonymity

Given the prevalence of state-sponsored violence and the intimidation and fear the arrests and torture of such a wide swath of bloggers must have engendered, it is somewhat surprising that so many Egyptian bloggers chose to use their real names. Egyptian bloggers pursued one of three strategies in enacting their identity online: anonymity, pseudo-anonymity and full identification. Pseudo-anonymity ranged from those who used pseudonyms and offered few details in their profile but blogged about their personal lives with enough detail that if someone were motivated to they could figure out who it was to actively providing a range of identifiable details such as first name, hometown, profession etc. but possibly leaving off a last name.

Hardly any bloggers, particularly among the cyberactivists, were truly anonymous, that is, masking their identities so that even those in their communities would not know them. Baheyya, for example, was one of the few anonymous bloggers in Egypt and one of the most famous and influential in the blogosphere. She wrote insightful and influential political analysis about current issues in Egypt in English and was rumored to be a member of the ruling NDP.[199] Even the most well known bloggers did not know who she was. She never did interviews, was unknown to journalists and other bloggers, and yet wrote one of the most influential Egyptian blogs domestically and internationally. She was an outlier. Homosexual bloggers also chose anonymity because of societal prejudices and concern that it could have negative repercussions professionally. Despite the potential dangers, however, blogging was "liberating" and unlike a traditional diary, was a form of communication that enabled people to know someone who was gay, and exchange commentary, which could even lead to acceptance (Operon 2008). Few other blogs pursued a strategy of complete anonymity, and certainly none of the other famous

[199] According to the blogger profile, Baheyya is an Egyptian female name that has come to stand in for Egypt itself.

bloggers, citizen journalists or cyberactivists. Anonymity and celebrity rarely go together, and can make it more difficult to activate certification and amplification mechanisms because there is generally a lower level of trust and authority.

The only community in the Egyptian blogosphere that chose anonymity across the board was homosexual bloggers, who adopted pseudonyms and limited personally identifying information as a survival strategy. Several Bahai bloggers also chose anonymity because their religion is not recognized in Egypt and they wrote about being persecuted, but many others chose to post with their names. In fact, a study of a snapshot of the Arab blogosphere in 2009 found that Arabic bloggers generally were more likely to use their name than blog anonymously (Etling et al. 2009, 5). The exceptions were Syrian, Kuwaiti, and Maghreb/French Bridge bloggers, who lived under different dynamics than Egypt, as well as a small cluster of Egyptian Baha'i bloggers. Generally, women were more likely to blog anonymously than men.

But anonymity, particularly among cyberactivists, could be seen in a negative light and undermine asabiyah. The choice of anonymity indicated that someone was scared or worried about political or legal repercussions, which empowered the state and detracted from the strength of the blogosphere. "I don't have anything to hide. I believe I am true so I have nothing to hide," said one blogger (Fattah 2008). Or as another blogger proclaimed:

> I don't respect the anonymous. Anyone can go and write a big thing, but if he's afraid to talk with his real name, I don't respect him. If you have a cause, you must show yourself. I am here, I am real, and I am not afraid, sitting in my home with my laptop. If you're afraid, don't do it. (Mustafa 2008)

Pseudo-anonymity was far more common, although even those who used a pseudonym usually provided enough information to be easily identified by friends or the authorities. This was even the case among the Muslim Brotherhood members, whose public membership in the

banned organization ostensibly could have gotten them arrested. The Berkman study found that in the Muslim Brotherhood cluster 78 percent used their names, a higher percentage than any other community in the Arabic blogosphere (Etling et al. 2009, 19). Muslim Sister bloggers who were not activists, however, were more likely to maintain a certain level of vagueness about their identity by using only their first names and not linking as pervasively to the broader blogosphere. Concerns about security, however, were rarely invoked as explanations for choosing this particular identification strategy. Rather these young bloggers were more concerned about their parents or employers finding out and causing worry or negative repercussions at work.

"I sometimes give identifying details that make it easy to find out my real name. A lot of people who read my blog know me personally to begin with, and I've gotten to know lots and lots of people through it. Ultimately, the only reason I even bother with this thin anonymity is because I don't want my parents to come across the blog," explained nominally anonymous blogger Forsoothsayer. Similarly Sandmonkey, who was nominally anonymous until revealing himself to be Mahmoud Salem in the wake of the 2011 revolution and gave me permission to use his real name, said in a 2008 interview that he blogged pseudonymously because his mother was a member of the NDP and he doubted his employers would look favorably upon his blogging. But the tension between publicity and popularity could compromise attempts at to keep one's identity under wraps. A 2007 article in *Arab Media & Society*, for example, identified Forsoothsayer's full name, age, occupation and other identifying information even though the author said she blogged anonymously.[200] She noted this in a comment in the article and specifically refuted that she did not like her job, an identifying detail mentioned in the article that could have potentially resulted in her losing her job. Thus by the time I spoke to her in 2008, she

[200] Forsoothsayer asked me to maintain her anonymity and thus I am not providing a link to the aforementioned article.

was wary of giving up her name and continued to attempt to maintain a cloak of anonymity, specifically mentioning the problem caused by sloppy journalism. Similarly Sandmonkey was so regularly interviewed and profiled that most people within the Egyptian blogosphere knew who he was, and anyone who really wanted to find out could easily do so given the level of specificity about his personal life on his blog.

Still others, like Gemyhood and Naje, who went by Biso for a while, simply adopted monikers as a type of pen name. "It's like Robin Hood because I believe in same ideas as Robin Hood. I'm not trying to be anonymous," explained Mohammad Gamal. "Everyone already knows that I am Gemmy. I'm was already doing the same thing before blogging through Yahoo groups, forums and chatting so I already had a character before blogging. And I'm not worried about the security services." Naje similarly explained that his pseudonym was not intended to disguise his identity as much as it was part of it: "Before I published my book I was anonymous – people reading my blog didn't know who I was, it was Biso. Now everyone knows Biso is Ahmed Naje. And before this most people know Ahmed Naje is Biso. But I wasn't scared *yaani*."

Most of the bloggers I interviewed wrote using their real name because it was a means of defiance or mechanism for establishing credibility. Many bloggers agreed that anonymity was not the norm in the Egyptian blog, as this illustrative quote by a blogger who said she followed an average of 100 blogs daily notes, "most bloggers put their real information, at least the bloggers I know" (Zeinab 2008). Bloggers, like those quoted above, downplayed concerns about surveillance or security. As Ahmed Abdel Fattah explained: "I am not anonymous because I am writing with my name, because I am not a hidden person. I am not popular, but I am known by the police and security, so there's no point in hiding my name. And my picture is published"

(Fattah 2008). Zeinab similarly said she did not think much about security, but that even if she did, she did not think they would care about her blog.

Credibility was a particularly important mechanism for citizen journalists, whose authority came from their reputation. The complicated dialectic between professional and amateur, activist versus journalist, was an ongoing negotiation for these figures. For example, Atef initially started her anti-torture blog without identifying herself because she thought it should not matter who the author of the blog was. But when she migrated her blog from Blogspot to Wordpress and sought to enhance its credibility with a wider audience, she realized she needed to attach a name to her blog. "I want to make it professional. Already the people know the editor is Noha," she explained to me at a café not far from the American University. "In the beginning, I thought that even if I face the same security problems I won't face serious problems because I rely on real sources, I don't fabricate anything; if I publish report by an NGO, I just bring it to the public, I don't fabricate it." Most of the bloggers who migrated onto Twitter adopted similar identity strategies. And of course the terms of service for Facebook required users to use their real names.

Conclusion

Many Egyptian youth began blogging and others stopped blogging during this period, but the Core bloggers continued. The initial excitement and newness of blogs attracted many youth to start blogs, although many did not sustain their blog or stopped blogging after the initial buzz wore off. Others stopped blogging because they just wanted to have fun. "They think it's just for fun, but when they found out it was a serious thing and the media was interested in blogging,

they stopped," a group of young women bloggers explained in a 2008 focus group in Sharqiya. This quote illustrates how blogging had become synonymous with cyberactivism and/or citizen journalism. Indeed since so many of bloggers were activists, the blogosphere became identified early on as an oppositional realm, which could be challenging for those who eschewed labels or who did not consider themselves as liberal or secular (Ahmed 2008). Yet Egyptians continued to flock to this new virtual public sphere, even despite the arrests and torture, which could have scared young people away from these new social media platforms. But as this chapter demonstrated, repression actually acted as a galvanizer.

At times I detected a hint of nostalgia for the early blogosphere, particularly when early adopters discussed the "history" of Egyptian cyberactivism. Nearly all of the early bloggers who helped build an Egyptian public sphere in the blogosphere continued to blog for several years, and were among the activists who helped spur the January 25, 2011 uprising. Many of them continued to use traditional blogging platforms and YouTube, as well as social networking platforms like Twitter and Facebook. And even the few who stopped blogging often did not remove their blogs, maintaining a virtual presence and asabiyah with the blogosphere by virtue of the blog prior history and continued accessibility. This was not the case among the later generation of bloggers who started when a broader array of platforms were available.

As cyberactivists gained experience with political protest, whether from Kefaya or the April 6, 2008 Strike, many came to feel that they needed to focus on the politics of small things before agitating for radical or revolutionary change. "I'm convinced political activism won't lead to anything now," Sheriff Ahmed said in a 2008 interview, saying that the youth needed to "focus battles on small things, like the rights of people, on local problems not huge political issues." In the wake of the 2008 General Strike, the April 6 Youth Movement emerged and from

the outset sought to link its online activism to embodied activism, awareness raising, and laying the groundwork for the long revolution.

The preceding chapter analyzed the contentious politics of the blogosphere between 2004 and 2008, highlighting the "episodic, public, collective interaction among" cyberactivists who made claims on the blogosphere, on Kefaya, and on the government (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly). As this chapter has shown there were no leaders in the blogosphere. There were important nodes and influencers, but no leaders per se, a dynamic that social media networks facilitated. Furthermore, as the structure of Kefaya moved away from its initial flat organization, which was complimentary to the networked structure of the blogosphere, the complimentarily of the movement and the blogosphere declined. Diffusion occurred within different sectors of Egyptian society at different times, with the Muslim Brotherhood learning and adapting blogging and cyberactivist strategies from the leftists activists and as a means "to help focus the media spotlight" on their issues, particularly the arrest of top leaders (al-Anani 2008). The following chapter examines the diffusion of blogging and the use of cyberactivism by and within the Ikhwan, and identifies key mechanisms and sequences within this important subsection of the Egyptian blogosphere.

CHAPTER VI

BLOGGERS AND BELIEVERS: DYNAMICS OF ACTIVISM AND IDENTITY IN THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

"Self-knowledge – always a construction no matter how much it feels like a discovery – is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others" – Craig Calhoun

The emergence of rank-and-file Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan Muslimeen*) members in cyberspace merits particular attention because the dynamics of the emergence and development of this subaltern community not only paralleled that of the broader Egyptian blogosphere but also gave rise to a youth movement within the Brotherhood.[201] These bloggers challenged traditional interpretive hierarchies and carved out space in the new public sphere in which they could enact their identities as Ikhwan (indeed the vast majority of whom publicly identified themselves as members of the banned organization) and converse on Islamic and political precepts in a way that bypassed traditional authorities and created new communicative spaces that generated autonomy and became sites of contentious politics. This chapter focuses on meso-level change within one of the most important groups in Egypt, and in doing so explains how this facilitated cross-ideational alliances and joint grievances that laid the groundwork for mass popular uprising. It seeks to answer the research questions at a subnational level.

Indeed, in many ways this Ikhwan blogosphere was a microcosm of the broader Egyptian blogosphere. Ikhwan bloggers reinterpreted religiocultural practices in the virtual sphere through their public interactions online, redefining their identity and the politics of dissent within the

[201] I use the term Brotherhood and Ikwhan interchangeably as they are both shorthand and used in common parlance.

Brotherhood. In particular three Quranic concepts of communication were adapted through online practices of interpretive and communicative actions, typically reserved for the official representatives of Islam in the *ulema* and the elder leaders of the Brotherhood. Brotherhood bloggers engaged in virtual *itjihad* (independent judgment), *ijma'* (consensus building), and *isnad* (witnessing) and through their virtual performances created collective action frames that mobilized their colleagues and prompted a new public conversation that collapsed traditional hierarchies of authority as well as the distinction between sender and receiver of communication.

Bloggers challenged not only the authority of the state but also of the Brotherhood leadership and Islamic spiritual guides by invoking their right to interpret Islam, translate Islamic tenets into the vernacular and speak for Muslims. This process of virtual *itjihad* empowered new interlocutors in the process of building consensus around key organizational ideologies and tenets. By employing and deploying these alternative media, Muslim Brotherhood bloggers carved out a space for themselves within the larger Egyptian blogosphere that could be eventually be characterized as the MB blogosphere. Like the Egyptian blogosphere more generally, the MB blogosphere passed through three evolutionary stages: core experimentation, activism and reflexive criticism (Radsch 2008a). Anani similarly identified three phases, the first being exploration and the second civil resistance, though this is too narrow of an interpretation of the types of activism performed since in many cases bloggers were using new media to narrate and construct new identities and issues rather than just for resistance, and self-criticism (al-Anani 2008). The story of the blogosphere's development is also a story about how a few rank-and-file youth came to play a disproportionately powerful role in the organization by transforming communicative space, and how this facilitated the development of the broad-based youth movement that developed in the blogosphere more broadly.

The youth of the Muslim Brotherhood were not immune from the lure of new media and the technological leaps others of their generation were experiencing midway through the 2000s. New and alternative media gave opposition and subaltern groups like the Muslim Brotherhood new tools for political organization, mobilization and advocacy, from straightforward online blogging platforms in the mid-2000s to mobile and microblogging in 2007 through to the explosive popularity of the social networking site Facebook by 2008. These technologies and ICT platforms operated according to a networking logic, drawing their power and potentiality from this connective informational logic, and thus favored the development of networks as the dominant social form that emerged from their use. The use of interactive Internet platforms to share and comment on content became the dominant articulation of dissent among a segment of Egyptian youth among the Ikhwan, just as it had within the broader society. These Internet-mediated, publicly articulations and interactions created a new definition of how politics would be done and who could participate, highlighting the generational divide between those who incorporated these ICTs and those who did not. These virtual, and embodied, human interactions generated a politics of small things that opened a space for freedom in which the power to imagine a different future was created, undermining the hegemony of the status quo (Goldfarb 2006, 136).

The advent of blogging and the development of a virtual public sphere in cyberspace presented an opportunity for the organization and those members who favored openness and democratic values, such as minority rights, freedom of expression and association, and representative government. Despite conjectures drawn from the writings of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb that the Islamist group would eschew modern technology as either a Western imposition or as contrary to a presumed fundamentalist ideology, its younger members saw the

value in engaging with the new technologies and tended to favor a political approach over a proselytizing one. Rather than eschew modernity and media power, these cyber-Ikhwan used the power of new media to amplify the Islamist message, challenge stereotypes and communicate with the Muslim *umma* as well as the West. In fact, engineering and computer science are popular majors among the Brotherhood and an overwhelming number of MB bloggers pursued a degree in that field.

The ensuing chapter describes the emergence of Ikhwan online and the development of this network within the broader Egyptian blogosphere by examining who these early adopters were, how blogging spread and why they blogged. It explores how strategies of resistance and power were incorporated in choices about identity, anonymity and participation in the virtual public sphere, and how gender informed these strategies. I examine key moments of contention that helped shape and define the Ikhwani blogosphere and the development of the collective action frames that connected the Muslim Brotherhood online, namely: the imprisonment of a key figure, the "Ninja" incident and arrests of top leaders, the military tribunals, critique of the party platform and other organizational doctrine, and the April 6 "Facebook" strike. The politics of small things are found in these interactions, events and definitional contests, and their power in the reactions and functioning of the Muslim Brotherhood organization.

The Politics of Public Identities

As the Egyptian blogosphere began to develop in the first few years of the new millennium, young members of the banned organization were drawn to the emerging public sphere defined by activism, visibility and ideals of freedom. In 2006 members of the Muslim

Brotherhood started to visibly emerge in the blogosphere, identifying themselves as members of the banned organization and joining the networks of digital cyberactivists and citizen journalists whose individual blogs collectively articulated a narrative about the importance of free speech, social justice and change from the status quo. Ikhwan bloggers were overwhelmingly college-educated, middle class youth who used a wide range of technological and scientific – both applied and social – reasoning to make Islam and the Brotherhood accessible to a new public and construct collective action frames that resonated within the broader blogosphere and among youth more generally.

My analysis of more than 60 MB blogs along with interviews with dozens of MB bloggers clearly indicated that they are overwhelmingly in their twenties or early thirties, though I met one as young as eight and another whose gray hair and senior position seemed to make asking his age inappropriate. "We Ikhwan have a great share of blogging. Until now most of them are young and not elderly. There are few bloggers of my age, though I think this will increase," said the latter (Ibrahim 2008). A majority were men, nearly all of who did not blog anonymously or attempt to hide their identity to any great lengths.

Blogging openly as a Brotherhood member was an inherently political and oppositional act, so casual Brotherhood bloggers who did so just for entertainment tended not to identify themselves as members. Risking retaliation by both government and movement for their publicity, Ikhwan bloggers filled a void created by President Hosni Mubarak's policies toward the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the MB was officially prevented from taking part in formal politics, it played an active role in daily socioeconomic life, from trade unions to social services, which put in start contrast the failures of the state to provide a safety net.

Officially outlawed but tolerated in practice, the Brotherhood had not been allowed to own mainstream media outlets but its members were allowed to run as independents for Parliament even though they remained quite limited in influencing Parliament.[202] But Hosni Mubarak's government did not control alternative media like the Internet and mobile phones nor restrict access to online blogging platforms like Blogger, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. These unedited, free, instantaneous informational platforms challenge the ability of the state to control the information environment and gave activists tools for building national coalitions and transnational support even as their daily interactions and discussions formed the social basis to create freedom.

Generational Dynamics

The Muslim Brotherhood can be split into three generational groupings defined by their view on how the organization should go about achieving its mission. The "old guard" from whence the Supreme Guide of the 2000s hailed, subscribed to the vision of MB founder Hassan al-Banna, in which the Islamization of society leads to the natural evolution of an Islamic state (Mitchell 1993b). Their approach therefore relies on missionary and social work in a bottom-up process of community building and proselytizing, or *daʿwa*. The ideology of the second

[202] As democracy became a buzzword in the late 20th century the Brotherhood undertook a variety of strategies to participate in representative politics, from running for syndicate elections to boycotting legislative ones to running so-called independent candidates amid a party ban. In 1990 it boycotted parliamentary elections along with several coalition partners but successfully won several elections at the trade union and university levels that enabled the movement to gain control of the Lawyer's Syndicate, the Medical syndicate, the Engineering Syndicate and university associations and faculty clubs (Sullivan 2009; Zubaida 2002). Although the government permitted the Muslim Brotherhood to indirectly field candidates in the past several parliamentary elections, the strength of the Brotherhood's showing in the first of three rounds of voting in the May 2005 elections was a shock to the authorities. The government that had allowed the Brotherhood to campaign more freely than ever before promptly clamped down on the group, arresting hundreds of its members before the next round, though it was still able to win 88 seats. In the elections since then the group has been banned or given limited access to participate. The emphasis on political process at the turn of the 21st century is indicative of the internal power structures within the organization and help explain why its young bloggers came to play such a significant role in the mid- to late-2000s.

generation, however, was focused on political action and the ballot box (Altman 2005, 5; Sullivan and Abed-Kotob 1999). They emphasize the role of politics and the political process, likely springing from that generation's experience with activism, unions/syndicates and universities in the 1970s. That was the same era when the group renounced violence and focused on expanding its reach through politics and by creating an extensive network of social services Among the figureheads of this generation were: Deputy Supreme Guide Mohammad Habib; Political Bureau head Essam al-Erian, whose 2009 nomination to the politburo was reportedly blocked by conservatives (Yeranian 2009); Mohammad Mahmoun al-Houdeiby, the son of former General Guide; Guidance Council member Abdelmunem Abu al-Futuh; Deputy Chairman Khayrat al-Shatter; and online editor Khaled Hamza. These were the leaders who most actively encouraged MB bloggers and were the recipients of support from the young members who made up the blogosphere.

The third generation of the Muslim Brotherhood comprises members under 40 but especially college-aged men *and* women who were comfortable with the trappings of modernity and globalization but were also part of an Egyptian turn towards greater social conservatism.[203] Nearly all the early MB bloggers fell in the last category. As a particularly activist and outspoken subset of the Brotherhood's membership, bloggers largely subscribed to cross-ideological coalition building, acknowledged the importance of public perception and believed in their right to free speech and dissent. Like their counterparts in the broader Egyptian blogosphere, these bloggers represented a new generation that was more open, progressive and democratically-

[203] Since the 1970s Egypt's society has become more visibly conservative than the previous generations, as evidenced, some say, by the increased numbers of women donning the *hijab*, the Muslim headscarf. See for example Mule, Pat and Diane Barthel. 1992. The return to the veil: Individual autonomy vs. Social esteem. *Sociological Forum* 7, no. 2: 323-332. http://www.jstor.org/stable/684313. There are a variety of reasons for why this has happened, including the flow of workers to and from the more conservative Gulf countries since the 1970s economic open-door policy was instituted, a reaction against U.S. hegemony and anti-terrorism rhetoric, and the poor economic conditions that have led people to seek religion as their last refuge, among others.

minded than their predecessors (al-Anani 2008; Lynch 2007a, 2007b). They professed a belief in the ideals of democracy, such as the rights and equality of women and minorities and freedom of speech, as evidenced in their posts about the MB Party Platform, as I discuss later in this chapter, and their support for blogger Kareem Amer, as discussed in Chapter Four.

In one typical post on leading Ikhwan blog 'Waves in a Sea of Change,' for example, Mohammed al-Naggar wrote about the fundamental right of all people to freedom of expression and that reason must triumph over emotion.[204] As Ibrahim Houdeiby explained when clarifying his support for Kareem (the blogger who was imprisoned for criticizing Islam), and the secular blogger Sandmonkey, his belief in the right of free expression trumped any concerns he might have over their particular views, no matter how much they clashed with his. In a post entitled 'I will still stand up for him' he wrote:

> When I expressed solidarity with Sandmonkey, and Kareem Amer a few months before, I was very clear: I disagree with what they have to say, yet I don't think attempting to silence them (by security threats or imprisonment) is a proper way of handling disagreements.[205]

Abdel Monem Mahmoud, for example, campaigned for the release of imprisoned journalists in late 2007 including Ahmed Ezz Eddin, a member of the Brotherhood who was imprisoned following his nomination to the Press Syndicate. Abdel Monem's articles surrounding the military tribunals and imprisonment of a fellow journalist highlighted the dismal state of press freedom in Egypt and urged all bloggers to publish statements of support for Eddin on their blogs as a token of solidarity on the issue of freedom of expression and to launch an

[204] http://2mwag.blogspot.com/2007_10_01_archive.html

[205] http://ihoudaiby.blogspot.com/2007/11/i-will-still-stand-up-for-him.html

"international campaign" to demand his freedom.[206] Amr Magdi, another active MB blogger, often blogged about the need for the organization to give women greater freedom "to talk, to move, and to be activists" he explained in an interview (2008).

This type of self-expression, which included defense of individual rights even when at odds with the dominant collective culture, contributed to the development of asabiyah across the blogosphere and the creation of ijma' among youth of different political persuasions. It also built trust between liberal seculars and MB youth, because they both believed in freedom of expression, women's rights, and democratic values, which was an important element in the creation of the youth movement. Having collectively identified the lack of freedom of expression as a shared grievance, the early MB bloggers were primed to take part in campaigns focused on demanding and taking this right.

Eschewing Anonymity in the Articulation of Identity

As several bloggers from this generation explained, the Muslim Brotherhood blogosphere began to form when a few members who came across blogs decided to try it out as a forum for free thought and expression; they often wrote about personal things as well as political, religious and societal issues. It was created through the use of blog names, URLs and/or profiles that expressly identified its creator as a member of the banned group. Labels and identity were a particularly salient topic among MB bloggers given their highly public repudiation of the secrecy that usually surrounded one's membership in the organization, especially among the youth. The public invocation of this identity represented a risky strategy of confrontation with the regime in a society where many members are reticent to even discuss their affiliation with their families.

[206] http://ana-ikhwan.blogspot.com/2007/10/blog-post_5262.html

Thus blogs, and the private social network Facebook, became a crucial outlet for evoking and enacting this identity. As one Muslim Sister blogger explained: “If the parents are not already Muslim Brotherhood, the poor kid or the poor girl she has to speak out somewhere, so she goes to a blog, and even in our home there are some families who parents are Muslim Brotherhood and yet they are kind of scared, like my mom and then she start saying don’t go out a lot, don’t speak a lot, and don’t a lot, like our home, my daddy is not scared, but my mom is, like, afraid a little bit.”

The construction of Muslim Brotherhood identity in the blogosphere was a reflexive act of creating and performing self-identity as well as a reactive act aimed at challenging stereotypes and seeking recognition. As blog “authors” they enacted authorial authority and power to create new and alternate knowledge (Foucault and Rabinow 1984). Through their blogs they imagined a new identity and new possibilities for what it means to be a Muslim, a woman, an Islamist, or an Egyptian. Imagination as a social practice is central to agency and the negotiation of identity and practice between individuals and what Appadurai calls “globally defined possibilities” (Appadurai 1996, 31).

> I wrote about the Ikhwan. I’m not afraid. It’s the idea of expressing yourself. I don’t care about any restrictions or dangers I face. It’s myself, and I want to express what I want, to talk about Ikhwan – our goals, aims and ideas. I once wrote about the long sought Caliphate. I wrote about the restrictions practiced on the Ikhwan. (Israa 2008)

Writing about modernity, Calhoun noted that modernity has made it "much harder for us to establish who we are and maintain this own identity satisfactorily in our lives and in the recognition or others" (Calhoun 1994, 10). Globalization and mediated connectivity have made it even harder as the global village brings far-flung others into conversation with oneself instantaneously and pervasively. “Self-knowledge – always a construction no matter how much

it feels like a discovery – is never altogether separable from claims to be known in specific ways by others" (Calhoun 1994). Identity construction in the blogosphere was an attempt to gain control of the representation of one's identity as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and assert the right to be known in a counter hegemonic way, giving anonymity little value in the blogosphere.

From the beginning Ikhwan bloggers used their real names and identities.[207] Most of the bloggers I interviewed created blogs using their real full name, while even those who used a pseudonym nonetheless provided enough information to be identified easily by acquaintances and the authorities. A study of the Arabic blogosphere in its entirety found that fewer Muslim Brotherhood bloggers blogged anonymously than any other group, with 78 percent using their real name (Etling et al. 2009, 19). The names of many of the first generation of bloggers mark an explicit turn by specific Egyptian bloggers towards overt identification with a particular group – the Brotherhood – through the blog's name and/or URL. This choice reflected …

Naming as an Form of Protest

The first to invoke his Muslim Brotherhood identity publicly on a blog was a young journalist in his late twenties, Abdel Monem Mahmoud, who started a blog in August 2006 called *Ana Ikhwan* (I am Muslim Brotherhood). "I started a blog because in Egypt there is not freedom, I can't say what I want," he explained. He was inspired by the activism of 2005 and wanted to change the perception of the MB, to humanize it at a time when Hamas' elections, the ongoing "War on Terror" against al-Qaeda and fear of Islamofascism tended to lump the MB in with terrorist groups opposed to participation in existing political systems. "I started a personal

[207] Ikhwan bloggers refer both to those who identified themselves as members of the MB and those who were members of the organizations and blogged but did not identify themselves as MB on their blogs.

blog to say I am human, I have thoughts," he said. With the help of blogger-activist and journalist Nora Younis, he got his blog up and running and soon made a splash (Mahmoud 2008).

Figure 13 Screenshot of Abdel Monem's profile photo from his blog

Many of those who followed in the footsteps of Abdel Monem chose to flaunt their identity and membership in the banned organization in the virtual public sphere, and those who did not nonetheless did little to hide their affiliation. Few created truly anonymous blogs, choosing instead to invoke labels like Egyptian, student, Ikhwan, and to offer details of their hometown, birth date, interests, favorite movies and books, and other personal and identifying information. These identity markers reduced ideological barriers and made it easier to build asabiyah with the imagined community of the blogosphere as other bloggers saw that they shared interests in common.

The majority of MB bloggers used Google's Blogger platform to create their blogs,[208] which automatically created a profile for the user with the options of filling in biographical and

[208] Google bought Blogger in 2003 and it became a widely popular platform Sherman, Chris. 2003. Puzzling out google's blogger acquisition. *Search Engine Watch*. http://searchenginewatch.com/2161891 (accessed 11 Nov. 2009). It enabled right-to-left script and an Arabic platform on its simple user interface by 2008. Nicholas, Tyrone.

demographic data along with an open-ended section called "About Me," which typically showed up on the top page of the blog. Osama Morsey, author of *Ana Erhaby (I am a terrorist)*, for example described himself as "spitting on the tyranny of the unjust ruler without fear or exaltation."[209] *Bent al Ikhwan (Daughter of the Brotherhood)* described herself on her profile as an "Egyptian girl who grew up on religion and morality out of Egypt and settled in Egypt, when examined from good company, as well as interesting life and found in the group."[210]

Mohamed Hamza, editor of IkhwanOnline.org, named his blog "One of the Brotherhood" when he planted his stake in the blogosphere in December 2006. Mohammed el-Naggar called his blog *Ana M3ahom* - I am with them- [211] explicitly invoking his membership in the Brotherhood and the need for all groups in Egypt to enjoy freedom of expression. In doing so he invoked the Ikhwan community of which he was a member as part of the imagined community of the blogosphere and its normative values. The same year Abdelrahman Rashwan started his blog "Brotherhood Youth,"[212] which became a venue for critiquing the organizational dynamics of the Brotherhood and dissecting the rhetoric and philosophy of the leadership.

Others did not explicitly name themselves Ikhwan in their blog names or URLs because they did not want to box themselves in by a label, not because they wanted to hide their affiliation. Amr Magdi started March 26, 2006 and right from the beginning delved into his

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2008. Three more languages for blogger. *The Official Google Blog*. http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2008/01/three-more-languages-for-blogger.html. Some of the more prolific and committed bloggers moved to Wordpress or other blogging platforms after starting on Blogger.

[209] http://www.blogger.com/profile/04819229071051828400

[210] http://ebna7masr2.blogspot.com

[211] http://anam3ahom.blogspot.com

[212] http://ikhwanyouth.blogspot.com

identity, the importance of labels and why he named his blog *Tark3at Keyboard*, which signifies tapping or drumming on a keyboard.[213] Despite being a committed Islamist turned activist, Magdi chose not to call his blog anything explicitly religious. Abdelrahman Ayyash, who started his blog a few months later, similarly chose the more innocuous name 'The strange one' for his Arabic blog, but also wrote in English on another blog, depending on which audience he wanted to reach (Ayyash 2008).[214] *Ana Ikhwan*'s Mahmoud said he sometimes wished he had chosen a different name for his blog because he became defined by it (Mahmoud 2008).

Female bloggers used more diversified strategies of representation and identity creation online, with more women blogging anonymously than their male counterparts though even they overwhelmingly chose to invoke their true identity. There were several high-profile, activist Muslim Sister bloggers, too. Female bloggers like Zahra al-Shater,[215] daughter of Deputy Supreme Guide Khirat al-Shater, Asmaa Yasser,[216] daughter of imprisoned leader Yasser Abdu, Eman Mahmoud Atia[217] and Arwa al-Taweel became outspoken advocates for Ikhwan rights and social justice, while others chose to use their blogs for personal development or as a public diary. Many Ikhwan sisters started blogs to talk about personal issues, thoughts or engage with friends and were less likely than their male counterparts to engage in critical discussions of national politics or organizational doctrine and policies, resulting in lower traffic to their blogs and fewer

[213] http://tark3atkeyboard.blogspot.com/ (Arabic) Drumming on the keyboard and http://ganobi.blogspot.com/ (English)

[214] http://al-ghareeb.blogspot.com (Arabic) The Strange One and http://2-b-egyptian.blogspot.com (English)

[215] http://www.khirat-elshater.com.

[216] http://elfagreya.blogspot.com

[217] http://ebna7masr2.blogspot.com

profile views. They often choose their given names for the URL and link to their friends and other MB bloggers more than to Egyptian blogs more generally.[218]

When MB bloggers engaged with each other in the blogosphere, through commenting on blog posts or linking and reposting, they were doing so as themselves. In fact, commenting was seen as an obligation of being a 'blogger,' as opposed to an optional part of engaging in the blogosphere, as it was in the broader Egyptian blogosphere or even the worldwide blogosphere. "It's a duty to comment on others blogs," several young women among the group of female MB bloggers in Sharqiya said. This form of active engagement helped build cohesiveness and community, as well as encouragement to bloggers by demonstrating that what they write is in fact being read.

Comments also represent a form of engagement and *daʿwa*, though proselytizing about blogs occurred on and offline. Since most people they communicate with in their daily, physical life did not know what blogs were, the women said they constantly talked to people about their blogs and encouraged them to create a blog themselves, and join the blogosphere. "People have started because we encouraged them," said several of the women. Through their blogrolls and commenting they performed *isnad* and created a virtual community, or proto-*umma*. If the *umma* represents the community of believers, information and communication technologies have become the vehicle for constructing imagined communities (Anderson 1991) or a virtual *umma* (Seib 2006; Roy 2004), with the Internet leading the way in the postmillennial era of mobile, computer-chip technologies. Blogs and other online forums like Facebook, in particular, facilitate the imagining of deterritorialized communities with their sets of friends or followers,

[218] The Berkman center study found that 70 percent of the MB blogs they analyzed were male. But many of the MB sister's blogs have low traffic and are apolitical, making them less likely to have been included because of the study's methodology.

pages, links and blogrolls, the virtual building blocks of a virtual community linked through their Muslim identities.

Within a year of the first known Brotherhood member starting a blog there were dozens of other Ikhwan bloggers who expressly identified themselves as such. Like the early adopters who formed the core of the Egyptian blogosphere more generally these first-generation bloggers often knew each other, and several became activists within the organization and within the broader political sphere. MB bloggers linked into the broader Egyptian blogosphere, hyperlinking to the Core bloggers in their blogrolls and writing about social justice issues (including the Palestinian cause), politics and religion. As the blogosphere expanded through 2009 it became identifiably distinct network within the Egyptian blogosphere as evidenced by the content of the blogs, links to other blogs and the profile descriptions they posted. A quantitative analysis of the Arab blogosphere in the spring of 2009 similarly identified the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as a distinct and identifiable presence in the blogosphere (Etling et al. 2009). But despite its gendered name, women were also among these bloggers and played an important role as cyberactivists and in refashioning the perception of women and their roles within the organization and political life more broadly.

Cyber Sisters: Newly Visible Participants in the Public Sphere

The Brotherhood is organized along patriarchal hierarchies, with all top leadership posts held by men, and women prohibited from serving in such authority roles. In fact, for most of the organization's existence, Muslims Sisters had been practically invisible to the general public. Segregated by organizational secrecy and conservative interpretations of the women's role in public life, Muslims Sisters did not appear in the mass media or political arena until the emergence of the blogosphere.

The blogosphere became the first public venue in which young women in the Muslim Brotherhood publicly enacted their identity as members of the banned organization. The diminutive teenager Arwa al-Taweel[219] was among the first generation of Ikhwan bloggers and helped pave the way for MB members to participate in the blogosphere, having encouraged and trained dozens if not hundreds of her fellow Ikhwan to blog. In June 2006, Arwa, a student at Zagazig University and daughter of a MB member, became one of the first Muslim Sisters to join the burgeoning blogosphere. She started her first blog in October 2005 at age 15. She shut the original one down after a year to start up another one, called *Spirit Blog*, before finally settling on *Ana Keda,* an expression that she translated as meaning something to the effect of "That's How I Am" or "I am Enough" to express herself and engage in political discussion (al-Taweel 2008).[220]

Her blog, and later her tweets and Facebook updates, became a venue for political activism and articulation of her Islamic faith and enabled her to construct her identity in the embodied public sphere. She became known as a blogger and cyberactivist, recognizable to strangers on the street because she posted her photo on her blog. Blogging was both personal and political, but she shied away from the public critique of the MB's party platform in favor of more personal reflections on life, love and poetry. But given her father's reputation and her own activism as a citizen journalist for *Al Jazeera Talk* and *Al Destor* and active support for Gaza, the former could hardly be separated from the later. In 2008 she said she would refuse to stop blogging – that is being a cyberactivist - if and when she got married, a promise she ended up keeping when she broke off her engagement with a man who wanted her to stay at home more

[219] She blogged at http://iamkeda.blogspot.com Ana Keda (That's How I Am/I am Enough) until June 2008 when she moved to http://arwaya.com/aw/ Wahi Elmashar (Feelings Reveal)

[220] Unlike many of her compatriots, however, her father had never been arrested.

often (al-Taweel 2008). Defying the traditional role of Muslim Sister as stay-at-home wife, she vowed to travel and remain politically active and found a husband who would support her. In the wake of the revolution she even professed an interest in running for parliament when she turned 30 (Krahe 2011). In many ways the blogosphere gave her a meaning and purpose beyond what society at large, and the society of the Muslim Brotherhood more specifically, would have.

Muslim Sister bloggers described the intensely personal nature of blogs along with their hopes and belief that engaging in the blogosphere would influence public opinion and conceptions about the MB. This striking duality of seemingly contradictory sentiments reflects the private and public effects of blogging, as a blogger named Hadija put it, or the reflexive and reactive aspects. For many of these Muslim Sisters blogging was the first time they had ever expressed their personal feelings publicly. Blogging was a form of empowerment, a way to exert control over one's personhood and identity, while gaining a sense of being able to *do* something in the face of a patriarchal hierarchy and an authoritarian state. As a MB blogger named Israa explained in a 2008 focus group: "It is a way to spread our ideas and concepts to people and make things that can change our facts and conditions."

Muslim Sister bloggers had to juggle more than just their studies and family responsibilities, some of them were mothers and wives, and carving time for blogging seemed to take on more importance as the MB blogosphere expanded. "For a long time I wanted to begin a blog but my time is busy, I have three children, a lot of responsibilities," explained Omeyma during the same focus group, a MB blogger who started blogging the in the spring of 2008 after her young son created a blog. She said she blogged because it gave her a way to express her opinion on events and communicate with others, even though she said she felt she had weak computer skills and was busy with her familial responsibilities (Omeyma 2008). And by

including a Brotherhood sign on her blog she publicly staked out her virtual territory in the public sphere as a Brotherhood stronghold. Since she was older, most of her friends did not have blogs, the "friends" she made in the blogosphere widened her social network and gave her an opportunity to communicate with people she otherwise would not have. In fact, all of the Muslim Brotherhood bloggers -- and nearly every other blogger as well – had met people in real life whom they had originally met online. This linking of the physical and the virtual was a key factor that contributed to strengthening weak links, building strong links, and setting the groundwork for a broadcasted youth movement.

The translation of online, virtual relationships and experiences into the real world blurred the lines between public and private life, and provided new and varied opportunities to expand their social circle. Such translation also contributed to attempts to claim control over the articulation of the Muslimwoman identity as well as the identity of "Brotherhood member" within their proximate society, not just in the public sphere.

The coming out of Muslim Sisters in the blogosphere echoed the emergence of a Muslim woman identity articulated in Arab, Western, Islamic and non-Islamic countries around the world in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001. The attacks by Al Qaeda became "an axial moment, the globalized, political, cultural, and economic conditions that enabled it, the rampant Islamophobia that followed it, and the increasingly interconnected world it has engendered have created the Muslimwoman" (Cooke 2008, 97). With the ensuing interest in Islam and Muslims, the Muslimwoman became the identity through which contestation over tradition and modernity, public and private, emancipation and subjugation, religion and secularism took place. Books, glossy magazines, plays and television shows about Muslim women emerged during this postmillennial period as women and men alike fought to control the articulation of this identity

and what it represented. Feminist reinterpretations clashed with conservative traditionalists seeking to maintain hegemonic control over its representation. This reinterpretation happened within a context of globalization, technological advancement and George W. Bush's "war on terror" and led some Muslim women to reinterpret authoritative texts and religious hierarchies and practice *itjihad,* leading to changes in understandings of what it meant to be a Muslim woman (Cooke 2008). Muslim sister bloggers were no exception. They challenged conventional expectations both within the organization and among the wider public about what it meant to be a woman in the Muslim Brotherhood.

Reflection and Reaction: Why They Blog

Since most major newspapers in Egypt were affiliated state-owned or affiliated with political parties, with the exception of the independent outlets previously discussed, and the radio and television industries were largely off-limits, the Internet provided the MB an important means of self-representation. Although the MB organized a student website as early as 1999 and was involved in the online news site IslamOnline.net, Khaled Hamza, Editor-in-Chief of Ikhwan Online, said the Brotherhood only decided to create a website around the same time that blogs began to emerge in 2005. Egyptian newspapers and mainstream media more generally had just started to create websites around that time as well, and even by the close of the decade the sites remained relatively unsophisticated, were treated more as post-publication bulletin boards that interactive and instantaneous *fora*, and had little if any monetization or advertising. As a relatively early adopter of the Internet in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood as a group was well positioned to take advantage of its ability to bypass middlemen and offer direct communication

to a relatively elite audience. Its Arabic website, www.ikhwanonline.com, and English one, www.ikhwanweb.com, were updated daily and provide a forum for articles by and about the MB as well as relevant news and opinion articles reposted from other publications in the Middle East and elsewhere. The early representation of the Brotherhood in cyberspace contrasted with the relative deficiency of the state online. The state-owned *Al Ahram* was one of the few state-owned outlets online but its site was relatively unsophisticated and it offered no way for users to interact with content or citizen to contribute at a time when the MB sites were very active and participatory. The early adoption of online communication by the Brotherhood enabled them to build links with the blogosphere and participate in the circular circulation of information and construction of an alternate view of the future.

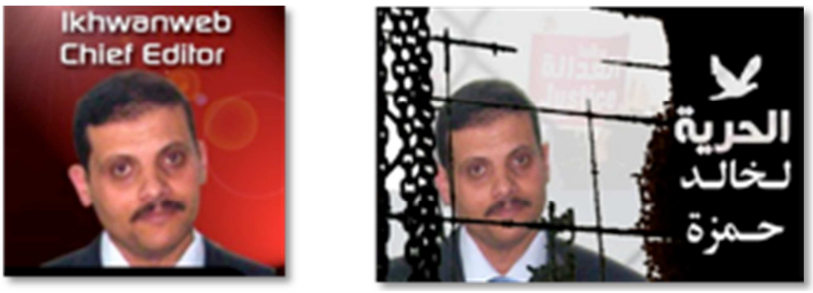

Figure 14 Online banners for Khaled Hamza's release (courtesy of Ibrahim Houdeiby)[221]

Many of the articles on the English website were written by bloggers. "We were interested in having their contributions through the web site, especially those who were critical of the MB, they began parallel to each other," Hamza said of Ikhwan blogs and website. "The website has begun to have a influence in mainstream media especially after the detention after

[221] http://ihoudaiby.blogspot.com/2008/03/sign-to-free-khaled-hamza.html

some of our reporters have faced," said Hamza in an interview, just days after being released himself from prison following a raid on the Ikhwan Web offices in 2008. These official sites help the organization to communicate its views directly and advocate its world vision to a worldwide audience; language and intended audience are thus a strategic consideration that results in different content on the Arabic site than the English one.[222] The sites had separate editorial staff and employed experienced journalists as well as citizen journalists as freelancers. The English site in particular was known for its professionalism; but the media properties were run out of the Guidance Office and thus potentially subject to editorial pressures and interference by the political arm (al-Anani 2007a). This problemetized the positioning of Ikhwan Online within the journalistic field, since the setup made it questionable whether the news sites adhered to the regulative rules of journalism, and potentially even the constitutive ones, since public relations and propaganda were contradictory to journalism.

Hamza, who acknowledged that there were concerns among the leadership about the public criticism and less than favorable articles that at times appeared on the site, said he was able to convince them that such feedback was important. "At the end of the day they understood, and they agreed with us that this criticism is important," he said in an interview. "We wanted to represent the humanitarian organization which has different points of view, we are not a unilateral organization, and we are close to reality, have many problems, which deserve criticism. We believe that this criticism is healthy for our organization it helps us discuss our problems and find some solutions for them." Controlling its own media properties and hence its

[222] This is relatively common in the region, where Arabic and English editorial staff and products are distinct and independent. Among these, as of 2009, Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera as well as IslamOnline in Cairo and the state-owned daily Arabic *Al Ahram* newspaper and English *Al Ahram Weekly*.

portrayal in the public sphere allowed the MB to represent itself in its attempts to influence its public perception and coverage by the mainstream media both at home and abroad.

Bloggers did more to shift and widen perception of the Brotherhood through their independent blogs than the officially sanctioned media, and the debates within the MB blogosphere in fact helped create a more nuanced view of the Brotherhood and its values and belie the perception of a single, monolithic group. This became strategically important after overthrow of Mubarak amid fears of an Islamist takeover because the lack of a dominant narrative about the Brotherhood made it more difficult to demonize it, and supporters were able to invoke the openness of the blogosphere and its engagement with its youth to support its claims that it supported democratic values.

Ijma' through Cross-ideational Alliances

The Ikhwan's entry into the blogosphere created an alliance with their liberal counterparts in the blogosphere at large and become part of the movement for change that swept through Egypt in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq, from Kefaya through to April 6, 2008 and into the revolution of 2011. The MB's young generation forcefully urged the MB to return to street protests for the first time in several years following attempts in 2004 and 2005 by supporters to start a movement, but which garnered little support on the ground or in the streets until Kefaya emerged as the leading articulation of political protest (Hamza 2008; Shorbagy 2007, 52). Members of the Brotherhood participated actively in the protests and demonstrations that engulfed Egypt from 2004 to 2006, and adopted and adapted alternative media to their causes as they emerged, as outlined in Chapter Four.

This provided Ikhwan youth with the opportunity to learn about political activism, how to deal with police and security forces, about living under surveillance, organizing, and mobilization. This time of political turmoil coincided with the emergence of blogging in Egypt and the development of better Arabization of Internet platforms and personal computing. The organization did not officially participate much in the demonstrations and protests organized by Kefaya in its early days, even though some early MB bloggers did individually. But on Sunday, March 27, 2005 the MB took to the streets by the hundreds as part of a 3,000-strong Kefaya demonstration against the constitutional referendum that resulted in the mass arrests discussed in Chapter Five. This marked a turn toward outwardly protesting domestic politics (El-Naggar 2005).

Among these activists in Kefaya were some of the Muslim Brotherhood's leading bloggers: Abdel Monem Mahmoud, Mustafa al-Naggar, Mohammed Adel, and others. On February 23, Mubarak called on parliament to amend Article 76 of the constitution to permit multi-candidate presidential elections.[223] Kefaya held anti-Mubarak demonstrations throughout February followed in March by two weeks of protest at several universities by the Muslim Brotherhood, whose members had been rounded up by the hundreds in recent weeks, to demand political reform (Abdel-Latif 2005). The catalyst that propelled the Egyptian blogosphere into an active realm of contention and digital activism were the spring 2005 demonstrations against the constitutional referendum and in support of judicial independence; the ones from whence Kefaya emerged as a major political movement. It was during this time that young Muslim Brotherhood members began to enter the blogosphere, meaning that from the outset the blogosphere

[223] The amendment set new electoral rules for multi-candidate elections but imposed tough new limits on potential candidates in what many viewed as yet another attempt by Mubarak to remain in power while giving his quarter-century reign a patina of legitimacy.

represented a realm of contention and contestation for the Ikhwan. But it was when the demonstrations turned violent that a new logic of political contestation and confrontation emerged that branded the blogosphere as an oppositional, activist realm and bloggers themselves as cyber-activists. Within this context a symbiosis developed between Kefaya, activists and bloggers, which lasted through late 2006. Kefaya's collective action frame revolved around change, which resonated with the Brotherhood bloggers and enabled them to form their own narratives within this broader frame and create ties with the activist network (Wheeler 2009). Estimates of the number of MB bloggers range from about a dozen in 2005 to 150 as of the spring of 2007 (Karam 2008; Lynch 2007b). But as Kefaya declined as a salient political force and cyberactivists decertified the movement, new dynamics emerged in the Ikhwani blogosphere.

For the MB activists this meant that they were once again back on their own and no longer part of an umbrella group, which had been lauded by the West as a harbinger of democratic change. The newly minted bloggers, however, remained connected to the broader activist movement whose nexus was in the blogosphere and which drew its strength from cyberactivists across the politico-religious spectrum dedicated to freedom of expression and human rights. These frames, produced through the individual, self-directed blogs of hundreds of individual Egyptians, remained the most compelling collective action frames of the blogosphere movement, including in the Brotherhood sub sphere.

In part due to the break with Kefaya as well as due to dynamics within the organization, bloggers turned their focus toward the organization itself in a reflexive move that opened the organization and its principles to greater scrutiny than ever before. The group had to rely on its own members and their initiatives, and bloggers came to play a special if unofficial role in the

organization because of their participation in the mediated public sphere and their efforts to influence the mainstream media and public opinion about the Brotherhood.

The Reflexive Turn Inwards

The reflexive turn inwards by MB bloggers was both a response to internal dynamics as well as external factors including a renewed crackdown on the Brotherhood and the lack of political activism in the streets following Kefaya's decline. These twenty-something youth, many still in college, debated the inner workings and processes of the organization to which they belonged, engaging in virtual *itjihad* that helped undermine internal ijma'. They criticized MB policy, including the party's political platform, the way internal elections were held, and ideology. They dominated the MB blogosphere as it developed and grew, just as activists dominated in the wider Egyptian blogosphere. Similarly "liberals" dominated the sub-blogosphere. The blogs created a field of *da'wa*, or communication/proselytizing, that made visible a whole new realm of discourse within the organization and propelled young, rank-and-file members to new heights of importance.

Debating the Party Platform

In late 2007 the Muslim Brotherhood made its party platform public after several months of internal debate and revision within the leadership.[224] The movement had never before released such a detailed and specific document describing their positions on a number of issues such as the office of the presidency and the role of shari'a courts and the *ulema*. According to one observer, "[t]he leaked versions focused on the authority of elections, the freedom to form

[224] This process occurred within a select commission of advisors chosen by Supreme Guide Akef to create a draft platform, though it is unclear how much the Shura council or administrative offices were involved in this process

political parties, and the importance of civil society, a rotation of power, the sovereignty of law, judicial independence, and so forth" (Lynch 2008). It received enormous attention from internal and international observers, giving such insight as it did into the positions of the secretive Islamist organization. It also became a key episode of contention in the MB blogosphere as young Brotherhood members challenged the privileged role of their leaders to interpret Islamic and Brotherhood doctrine. When the party platform was officially put forth into the public sphere in September, there was an outcry from several of the core Ikhwan activist bloggers (among others). A robust debate emerged in the blogosphere and other online platforms like Islam Online[225] as bloggers engaged in virtual *itjihad*.

The platform agenda was more religious than any of the previously leaked drafts and included several provisions that drew criticism from within and outside the organization, with critical groups using it as proof of the MB's anti-democratic nature and of what would happen if they were to come to power. There were three major focal points of criticism that emerged from the 128-page platform: it created a Higher Ulemma Council tasked with legislative duties, prohibited Coptic Christians and women from becoming president and made shari'a the law of the land.

One of the rallying points around which many bloggers coalesced their criticism was the role and place of women, which the party platform appeared to relegate to a secondary role. Activist bloggers spoke out critically against the leadership's position, even as they sought to combat negative perceptions about the MB's view of women. Abdel Monem, for example, pointed out the fundamental contradiction of the platform asserting the equality of all Egyptian citizens yet excluding women and Copts from the running for president and asserted that such

[225] http://www.islamonline.net

prohibitions contravened the notion of Egyptian citizenship and equal rights.[226] In one post he wrote about his interview with Issam al-Erian, in which he forthrightly asked him whether indeed the platform prohibited Christian Egyptians from running despite attempts by Erian to avoid having to get into such details. The elicited response compared the religious requirements to those of the Malay in Malaysia or Catholics in the United States, but Erian admitted that the MB lacks sophisticated political thinkers who can develop a thoughtful, sophisticated platform since such a thing has not been done before and the political branch of the organization was less developed than the *daʿwa* one.[227] Magdy Saad was similarly critical of the Brotherhood's stance, and wrote critical posts about the concept of separation between the movement and politics while defending the notion of speaking out publicly and critically of the organization.[228] Throughout such posts there are references to Islamic scholars, experts, and the writings of Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna that are used to support the interpretations of the bloggers by rooting them in their Islamic tradition- virtual *itjihad* via isnad.

But there were other key moments that MB bloggers evoked to show the organization's tolerance and support of women. One of these was the candidacy of Makarem al-Deiry in the 2005 parliamentary elections, one of only 43 women to run in a slate of 1,635 candidates. In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood had urged 24 women to run but Deiry was the only one who was willing to "take the chance if being imprisoned and sexually assaulted as all opposition candidates risk," according to the account of a woman who refused to run (Chinoy 2006). She ran under the slogan "reform our world through our religion" to represent Nasr City against two

[226] See for example http://ana-ikhwan.blogspot.com/2007/09/blog-post_29.html

[227] http://ana-ikhwan.blogspot.com/2007/10/blog-post_09

[228] See for example http://2mwag.blogspot.com/2007_11_01_archive.html

NDP businessmen. Despite evidence of vote buying and coercion Deiry won, but a judge overturned the results reportedly at the behest of the ruling party (Chinoy 2006; Shehab 2005). "The government refused the Muslim Brotherhood to produce an example by a female becoming a parliament member, because this point makes others change their view of the Muslim Brotherhood and others say the Muslim Brotherhood does not give room to females," said one MB blogger, explaining why he thought Deiry lost. This gendered exclusivity was not in line with the constitutive rules of the blogosphere, and became an issue around which normative claimaking by some young MB bloggers revolved.

Itjihad and Interpretive Rights

The emphasis on religion and *daʿwa* at the expense of political process unraveled years of work by liberal MB leaders and reformists to assuage concerns among the liberal elite and the broader Egyptian public about the MB's political goals, representing a regression rather than an advance in its thinking (Hamzawy 2007). And coming not long after the militia incident the platform merely affirmed what the organization's critics claimed: that Egyptians would be subject to shari'a law and retrograde policies toward Christians and women. Interestingly, these debates on internal policies – even those related to women - were dominated by male bloggers with most Muslim Sisters choosing not to engage in the debate on their blogs. Even some of the most outspoken Muslim Sister bloggers like Arwa al-Taweel, for example, said she eschewed discussion of the platform on their blogs because they did not like to play politics.

The inherently public blogosphere comprised new interpreters who formed a virtual community, or *umma*, with direct access to the public. Bloggers challenged the privileged role of the Brotherhood leadership and the learned Islamic scholars, usurping the right to interpret and

opine about the platform and the Brotherhood's direction more generally as they engaged in *itjihad*. They were "facilitated by this medium to address and thereby to reframe Islam's authority and expression for those like themselves and others who come" online (Anderson 1999, 45). As Anderson notes, challenges to authority often revolve around these interpretive rights, and the Muslim Brotherhood was no exception: young reformist bloggers demanded more openness, greater accountability, and inclusion in a democratic political process that many leaders felt was at odds with the Brotherhood's objectives and principles. Abdelrahman Rashwan, for example, critiqued organizational and rhetorical issues within the MB.[229] In one post he questioned whether the party platform was real or merely a concept,[230] while in another he analyzed the status of MB media online.[231]

The use of MB's slogan "Islam is the solution" for parliamentary campaigning became a matter of contestation between bloggers, who felt it was inappropriate and exclusionary, and leaders. Such internal debate among the rank and file was unprecedented. But blogging was an oppositional practice, and subjecting the slogan to scrutiny and contesting its place in the Brotherhood's political endeavors was perceived as a right to free expression by the bloggers who did so. Bloggers weren't the only ones who criticized the use of the slogan, but the Ikhwan bloggers were insiders rather than outside observers. One blogger, for example, said he preferred "a slogan like 'Reform is the solution' so that others can share with us in it," (al-Gaaly 2008). He discussed this with bloggers who both disagreed and agreed with him on his blog; "I think I even changed some opinions," he said. Via *itjihad* they sought to distinguish between politics and

[229] http://ikhwanyouth.blogspot.com

[230] http://ikhwanyouth.blogspot.com/2007/08/blog-post.html

[231] http://ikhwanyouth.blogspot.com/2007/11/blog-post.html

religion and relegate each to a separate field of practice in which the rules differ and the articulation of one does not bleed into the other. As one MB blogger explained, "bloggers talked about this slogan and criticized it and tried to develop new slogans because of a lot of political analysis says it is not a good thing to play in politics with the holy slogan. If you're playing in politics you should follow rules of politics not of holy matters" (Magdi 2008). A week before the local elections the leadership decided not to use the slogan, which several interviewees attributed in part to the pressure applied by bloggers.

Mustafa al-Naggar, who blogged at Waves in a Sea of Change, was another outspoken blogger.[232] Arrested following the "ninja incident," he said he decided while in jail to start a blog in hopes of opening a "window" to discuss ideas with others (al-Naggar 2008). He used his blog to advocate for a strategic separation between the Brotherhood's religious outreach and political role; leading what Anani called the "second generation" of MB bloggers (2008). The bloggers who discussed and debated the party platform, Ikhwan strategy and internal policies crossed red lines and ventured into territory that members had never explored publicly, much less those among the rank-and-file youth. As one blogger explained, Brotherhood bloggers "forced their leaders to respect some lines that weren't respected before, like freedom of expression, which became stronger… you can say your opinion and not be scared of anything" (Magdi 2008).

Debate Spurs Expansion, Division

The public debate prompted several members to start blogs, often because it was the first they had heard much about blogs or because they objected to activist reformers co-opting the youth voice of the Ikhwan. The divisions within the organization were replicated in the blogosphere, where core bloggers became activists on the issue while newer bloggers,

[232] http://2mwag.blogspot.com, m_naggar.blogspot.com

representing a broader subsection of the organization, defended the MB position or refused to air the "dirty laundry" of internal dissent. Among a focus group of more than a dozen male bloggers located in Sharqiya, a governate about two hours northeast of Cairo known as a MB stronghold, only one had written about the political party issue. None of the female bloggers in a focus group of ten from the same rural area had written on the topic. Nearly all of them were among the second or third wave of bloggers, representing a diversification of the types of youth who were starting to blog and the narratives they constructed. Which is not to say that all young members were activists or critics or proponents of the political approach, but that the most vocal in the public sphere were.

The media coverage and debate within the Brotherhood about the bloggers' internal criticism ensured that by the end of the year most Ikhwan knew what a blog was. The party platform debate prompted another wave of expansion, and by the end of 2007 even a few older and distinguished members of the MB had established blogs, though they remained the exception rather than the rule:[233]

> The strange thing is that the blogosphere is no longer limited to just the young, but is one in which the large icons belong, whether they are independent or belong to a streams and a variety of intellectual trends, such as Ibrahim al-Za'farani, Ahmed Fouad Negm; Hanan Farouk; Hammad, Abdel Aziz Taab, Hussein Ali Mohammed, Ahmed al-Khafaji, Khaled Hifzi, Haitham Abu Khalil. (al-Hamid 2007)

By 2008 the Brotherhood blogosphere was divided on whether the unprecedented opening of internal issues and debates to public scrutiny was something they supported or not. Some bloggers felt the internal debates should remain private within the organization because

[233] According to the Berkman study only 9 percent of the Arabic blogosphere included bloggers over age 35 and nearly none over age 60 (36). Unlike blogosphere's in other locales, like the United States, blogging has not been widely adopted by companies, mainstream media, and political candidates or office holders. Blogging in Egypt remains a predominantly youthful activity and is heavily associated with political opposition, limiting its expansion beyond the personal realm to professional fields or as part of professional practices.

there was no purpose served by opening it to wider debate and scrutiny. “This is internal business between my brothers,” a Brotherhood blogger named Hossama told me. “Our ideas we can easily reach our ideas to MB and it’s effective, but not to public because not useful to know about anything for MB.” Although divisions between critical bloggers and those who felt blogs were not the appropriate forum for internal debate emerged as the MB blogosphere expanded and diversified, the most popular and prominent bloggers came from the former group, in part because they were also linked into the broader activist networks being created through the blogosphere.

Most lesser-known Brotherhood bloggers, the ones whose profile views fall within an average range of less than 2000 and are not quoted by academics or the media, did not actively participate in debate on the party platform and felt that was not the purpose of their blogs. They preferred to engage in *ijma’*, or consensus building, around the party platform and other internal matters offline through more traditional means. During a focus group with more than a dozen male Muslim Brotherhood bloggers in or recently graduated from college, only one of them said they engaged in debate over the party platform on his blog. “No one wrote about the party platform on the blogs,” Amr Salem, a MB youth blogger told me in a 2008 focus group, referring to his group of friends. “We don’t write about this, many bloggers wrote about it and we can’t add anything to this,” added Ali, who had been blogging for two years by 2008. Professor and surgeon Dr. Ihab Ibrahim, noted that the party platform was a “sensitive topic” and said that while there are “some private things that shouldn’t be publicized” and he might disagree at times with Brotherhood bloggers, he nonetheless appreciated them for “leading blogger activity” and thought it was “helpful to have bloggers discussing the party platform” (Ibrahim 2008). For others, criticism was focused less on the national, political level of MB platforms and

engagement with the state, and more on the parochial level of how the Brotherhood affects familial life. "A Muslim Brother has many responsibilities outside their houses and may spend time away their families and this has an effect in their families and their children," said one blogger, adding that she has written on this topic and hoped the leadership read it (Omeyma 2008). Such discussions and debate exemplify the democratic potentials many scholars attribute to the Internet and blogs because they are open, dialogic, and anyone can participate (Seib 2007).

Diffusion of Blogging Among "Believers"

The wave of bloggers who started in 2008 represented a widening of the representativeness of the Brotherhood blogosphere. Whereas the MB's "new generation" bloggers who subscribed to the political vision of the leadership's second generation, who promoted politics over proselytizing, many in the second wave of bloggers who joined the blogosphere in 2008 and onwards identified with the *daʿwa* objective of the Muslim Brotherhood's first generation of leaders. They were more conservative, less activist and represented a broadening of the blogosphere beyond the political and Ikhwani activism, though activists remained dominant just as they did in the broader Egyptian blogosphere. Brotherhood bloggers also found venues to meet and coordinate offline, with the annual Cairo Conference providing an important embodied venue for networking, asabiyah and ijma' building among activists.

Initially started as an anti-Iraq war conference, it grew to be a major activist conference that drew activists and bloggers from across the religiopolitical spectrum, but especially from the Muslim Brotherhood and liberal anarchists. Workshops on cyberactivism were plentiful and

bloggers figured prominently among the speakers and workshop leaders, helping to diffuse knowledge about the mechanisms and strategies of virtual contentious politics. Blogging, as well as virtual reality platforms like Second Life and other avatar-based virtual communities, drew people interested in learning about new ways to get involved in political activism. Moaz Abdelkareem, a Brotherhood member who was just starting to get his blog going at the April 2008 conference, ended up choosing the name "I love the Brotherhood, Internal Security" as an outright confrontation with the state security forces who were largely responsible for the state crackdowns on the movement.[234] This small but political act implicitly signaled asabiyah with those who had born the brunt of the crackdown by Internal Security and reinforced the normative values of free and confrontational speech in the blogosphere.

By 2008 blogs were part of the common parlance among young Brotherhood members, even among those who did not "yet" have a blog. Dozens of people I spoke to who did not blog professed a desire to do so. By 2008 blogging had become the status quo for MB activists and young members more generally because they lacked alternative venues in which to express themselves. Blogging became a shared practice among activist youth, and a common characteristic of a certain 'type' of MB member - activists. The quote below is illustrative:

> In the Muslim Brotherhood, when you find two married or engaged people, just ask the man and ask the girl, you will find each one has a blog, like almost all of them, especially the generation which is concerned in going to the Cairo [Anti-War] Conference, and things like that … The new generation already has blogs. It's become something like a fashion. So many Ikhwan have blogs. We are the ones most deprived from speaking about our point of view – in the university and the newspapers, even in the house. *Ana Ikhwan*. You can't even say something like this, because you are really scared. When you say Ikhwan, you are really scared what may happen. (College-aged MB female blogger)

By 2009 there were several thousand Muslim Brotherhood bloggers, Facebookers and YouTube users who continued to be actively engaged in politics and political movements (Etling

[234] http://loveikhwan.blogspot.com

et al. 2009). Ikhwan cyberactivist Mohammed Hamza was appointed to a youth leadership position, Abdel Monem Mahmoud received personal calls from leaders. Facebook also emerged as an important virtual venue for the Brotherhood youth, with dozens of pages started in support of the group. Facebook also contributed to cross-ideational consensus building through the use of fan pages, 'likes', and events. In the section that follows I explore how why Ikhwan youth believed blogging and cyberactivism were so important.

Repression Propels Blogosphere Expansion

Abdel Monem Mahmoud's arrest on February 13, 2006 provoked a major campaign for his release led by prominent leftist and activist bloggers across the blogosphere that helped raise awareness of the existence of Muslim Brotherhood bloggers. Ongoing arrests of Brotherhood members inspired their children to start blogging. A series of arrests in 2007 that netted several key figures among the reformists prompted their children to start blogging. The arrests and subsequent military tribunals in 2008 inspired several of the imprisoned men's children – both sons and daughters – to start individual and group blogs, with *Ensaa* being the most prominent among the latter. The larger the crackdown by the government, the more blogs were created. Unlike previous eras, when a book might be written over years and smuggled out of prison, blogs were immediate, expressive and personal while offering the possibility of providing evidentiary fact (such as photos, videos, etc) of the crackdown.

Each time Abdel Monem was arrested more MB members were inspired to start their own blogs. His arrests drew attention to the plight of the Ikhwan while giving it a human dimension with a distinctly liberal and even democratic hue within the context of the fight for freedom of expression. He was a campus MB leader from 2003 to 2007 while he pursued a career in journalism and became involved in the activism of 2005 and 2006. On 13 February

2006 he turned himself in to state security after hearing of a warrant for his arrest and was subsequently tortured (Mahmoud 2008). He described to me, just as he had publicly on his blog, how state security interrogated him for two hours about his blog: about why he writes a blog, why he wrote that he was tortured, and why "the West" was writing about him and other bloggers.

His arrest again in 2007 was another galvanizing event. The crackdown on MB activism – and indirectly blogging –prompted another wave of inspiration that proved strong enough to prompt the creation of dozens of new blogs. On 15 April 2007 state security arrested Mahmoud after he had boarded a plane at Cairo International Airport as he was about to embark on a reporting tour to seven Arab countries for Al Hiwar satellite channel to report on the status of human rights.[235] Several prominent bloggers, namely Alaa Abdel Fattah,[236] Younis,[237] and Hamalawy,[238] organized a campaign for his release that transcended the ideological lines of the Egyptian blogosphere as bloggers from throughout the virtual community posted banners, sent text messages, created Flikr and YouTube content protesting his imprisonment and demanding his release and performing virtual *isnad*, or witnessing, as they documented his case and came to his defense. By this time he was relatively famous and his arrest and subsequent campaign by cyberactivists for his release coincided with a dramatic increase in the number of MB bloggers.

The 2007 campaign for Abdel Monem's release from prison exemplified the cross-ideological solidarity among bloggers. "Abdel Monem is not just a blogger, he's also a reporter,

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[235] See for example http://arabist.net/arabawy/2007/04/15/blogger-moneim-detained http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2007/05/04/abdel-monem-mahmoud-the-egyptian-totalitarian-regime-is-the-problem

[236] http://www.manalaa.net

[237] http://www.norayounis.com

[238] http://www.arabawy.com but during that time blogging at The Arabist http://www.arabist.com

and he's one of the best reporting about the citizens since blogging started," wrote Hamalawy in a post about Menem's arrest. He bore witness to Abdel Monem's professionalism, using *isnad* as a form of validation and stimulation. He and other non-Ikhwan bloggers organized the campaign for his release, posting banners on their blogs against the military tribunal and against Abdel Monem's detention.

> My friends tell me in prison that Khaled Hamza[239] printed some papers about this campaign and showed me. I knew wrote about, maybe wrote 1 or 2 posts, but didn't believe they would make big campaign like this. When I searched I found so many articles. Ideology was irrelevant. Hossam is a friend, no religion, but we were talking about freedom didn't matter what party from. If there's not freedom there's nothing. Freedom not just expression. (Mahmoud 2008)

Despite all the compelling individual stories that made their way into the blogosphere, the MB made a few critical errors after sweeping the parliamentary elections in 2005; chief among these was their handling of the Al Azhar ninja incident (al-Anani 2007b).

Men in Black: the Ninja Episode

On December 10, 2006, dozens of Muslim Brotherhood students who were members of the Free Students Union at Al Azhar University protested their exclusion from the student union elections and staged a martial arts display and military parade. Dressed in black and wearing balaclavas with "*samidun*" (the steadfast) written across them (Human Rights Watch 2006c), the student's performance was intended to be a theatrical satire of university interference and the security forces, which the media were invited to cover.

But the event backfired, coming the same month the regime launched a severe crackdown on the MB (Human Rights Watch 2006c). Jameel Theyabi, described the "ninja incident" in an opinion piece for *Dar al-Hayat* that exemplified its reception by the public:

[239] Khaled Hamza was director and editorial manager of the Ikhwan website and a great supporter of the blogging youth

> The military parade, the wearing of uniforms, displaying the phrase, 'We Will be Steadfast', and the drills involving combative sports, betray the group's intent to plan for the creation of militia structures, and a return by the group to the era of 'secret cells'... and by these demonstrations, it is seeking to deliver a news flash that says: 'The group is still out there, and is capable of military action, recruitment of new elements, military training and mobilization'... I believe that the group's public power display represents a kind of coded message to awaken sleeper cells within Egypt and abroad. (Theyabi 2006)

The highly public and visible event exploded with the arrests of about 150 students and more than a dozen top Ikhwan leaders Khairat al-Shater, Ahmad Ezz al-Din, a journalist and press secretary to the supreme guide, and Sadiq al-Sharkawey, a businessman and father of Abdullah Sharkawey, who would become an *Ensaa* cyberactivist because of his father's imprisonment (al-Sherkawey 2008; *Prisoners of faith campaign packet* 2007). Although the Brotherhood attempted to distance itself from the group and issued a denial amid allegations by anti-Islamists that the group was militarizing and awakening "sleeper cells" (Poole 2007), the event set off a major confrontation between the group and the government.

The event provided the cover the government needed to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood, resulting in mass arrests of more than 1,000 members and at least 30 top leaders. The Interior Ministry charged they had created "deterrence committees ... trained in the arts of combat and provided with knives, sticks and chains, and appointed to start holding strikes and demonstrations and acts of unrest in the university," according to an official statement (El-Naggar 2006). In the following weeks the regime also seized their financial assets, froze their bank accounts and closed their businesses. On February 6, 2007 Mubarak referred the cases of several top leaders to military court, a move not taken since 2001 and pushed through a constitutional referendum that included prohibitions against religious-based political action.

The arrests galvanized young members, with many bloggers weighing in on how the event played so badly with the media and prompted a government backlash that reverberated

throughout the country and would make the leadership wary of taking to the streets again any time soon.

> It was very bad actually. It gave a very bad impression to the media, and the government took advantage of this mistake to make a very big media campaign. And then they cracked down against the Ikhwan and arrested about 124 students. And the same day they arrested 16 of the leaders. One of them was Khairat Shater, another was my father. This was in 2006. In December. And so after this, the students were released, but my father and his colleague are still in jail. (al-Sherkawey 2008)

Although a Cairo criminal court dismissed all charges against 16 of the defendants in January 2007 and ordered their immediate release, just moments later they were re-arrested and Mubarak transferred their case to military court,[240] along with 24 others, marking the first time since the 2002 MB trials that civilians were referred to military tribunals.[241] The arrests and imprisonment of their fathers prompted several young members to start blogs and then to collaborate on one together. In February Ensaa[242] was born, the citizen journalism collective run by the children of imprisoned MB leaders that I analyzed in Chapter Four.

Decentralization and Individualism

Unlike the hierarchical, organized structure of the Muslim Brotherhood, which operates according to an organizational logic of cells and secrecy, the dynamics of the blogosphere are those of a network shaped by the logic and values of networking practices. As previously discussed, this network logic is produced and maintained by practices shaped by the cultural logic of networking in which diverse, self-managed actors create connections among each other

[240] The Emergency Law and a constitutional amendment adopted in 2007 gives the president the power to refer cases to special courts or military tribunals

[241] http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119114.htm

[242] http://ensaa.blogspot.com/

through self-directed, decentralized coordination that enables information to circulate freely (Castells 1996, 55; Juris 2004, 342). Cyberactivists and bloggers across the spectrum overwhelmingly perceived blogging as a personal, self-directed activity based on individual expression. Quotidian struggles about what to study, who to marry, how to comport oneself, and the way that blogging and social media use impacted on these discussions and choices were indicative of how a technologically-infected politics of small things generated new ideas about the order of things that had broader political implications.

Even though Ikhwan strongly identified with their membership in the group, Brotherhood bloggers nonetheless expressed a strong individual streak that could appear counterintuitive given the group's stated goals of constituting the Islamic *umma*, or community, and emphasis on the group over the person. As one MB blogger put it: "In my blog I'm Ahmed Abdel Fattah, not Ahmed Abdel Fattah from Muslim Brotherhood" (Fattah 2008). The view that blogging is "supposed" to be an individual activity and blogs the expression of individual opinion was repeated throughout conversations with bloggers from the most conservative to the most liberal, who all expressed values and engaged in practices that reproduced a cultural logic of networking. An Ensaa contributor and the son of an imprisoned MB leader summed up what many others expressed:

> Well, bloggers, blogging anyway, is supposed to be individual. So you could organize the official website like Ikhwan Online or Ilkhwanweb, the English website. These have to be organized and have a system and so on. But whatever the blogger says, it's supposed to be individual and expressing themselves. It's supposed to be a one-man show. (al-Sherkawey 2008)

As MB bloggers became more numerous and a MB blogosphere emerged, there were efforts by some to categorize, organize and codify these MB blogs. Various organizational schemas were proposed, ranging from a virtual community created through an online aggregator

to a physical manifestation in the form of a bloggers union or syndicate. Ayyash, for example, proposed an aggregator to create a "coordinated public" of MB and Islamist bloggers so that they could "know our numbers" and determine the feasibility of creating an association.[243] In mid-2007 he urged all bloggers who subscribe to the idea that "Islam is the solution" to submit the RSS feeds of their blogs to the aggregator. But the issue of criteria and identity came to a fore as discussants on the blog wanted to know how inclusion would occur, whether Islamist who did not identify with Muslim Brotherhood would be included and whether such organization would be beneficial or harmful to the independence of bloggers.

Organized or top-down blogging delegitimized those blogs as a form of propaganda and were antithetical to the values, identity and cultural logic of the Egyptian blogosphere. This meant that blogs perceived to be calculated attempts to exploit the blogosphere's powers were seen as invalid, false and fake. Organic coordination or *ijma'* that arose through grassroots collaboration and spontaneous solidarity was fine; efforts at codifying organization and managing coordination or manipulation by leaders to harness the power of blogs were rejected as inauthentic and heretical to the cultural logic of the Egyptian blogosphere at large.

Many of the Ikhwan who started blogs after mid-2007 never integrated with the Egyptian blogosphere writ large, but rather confined themselves to a sub-sphere of the MB blogosphere in which they often seemed to replicate the organization logic of the Muslim Brotherhood rather than the network logic of the virtual public sphere in which they blogged. Because they violated the regulative rules of blogging their blogs remained small, their visitors few and their engagement short-lived. As Hamza explained, in mid-2007 there was a move to "encourage Brotherhood members to blog as an organizational obligation, and a huge blogging movement

[243] http://al-ghareeb.blogspot.com/2007/06/blog-post_24.html

emerged after this; but I don't believe that this is a real one, because they did not understand that then nature of blogging is to be a spontaneous expression of human experiences, personal experiences" (Hamza 2008). He specifically pointed to the blogs that "do wrong" by preaching or inviting people, considering these to be propaganda.

However, MB cyberactivists who viewed blogs as a personal realm of expression and objected to the creation of an organization *for* or *of* bloggers nonetheless saw no contradiction in using their blogs as organizing tools:

> [I]t's ok to organize, to call, or contact other bloggers to make some activities, yeah. In the past the bloggers were only covering stories, but I think after the arrest of Malek Mustafa and then Abdel Monem Mahmoud, they are now appearing as independent. And they can organize their own activities. But you can't say that there is a leader, or a head of bloggers. Just, you know, they organize some activities, and then that's it. (al-Sherkawey 2008)

By this time the impact of blogs had been seen and noted by some in the leadership. It was also noted by skeptical outsiders who saw a manipulative hand in the burgeoning numbers of Brotherhood youth in the blogosphere. The idea of a top-down organizational directive contrasted with the values of self-direction, self-management and decentralized coordination reflected in the logic of the blogosphere. Bloggers embodied these values in their practices and made them a defining part of what it meant to be a blogger and have a blog, which helps explain why political parties, businesses and other traditional collectives did not create blogs or see the blogosphere as a valuable place to put up stakes the way they did in other countries. Nor did the ruling party, the NDP, attempt to colonize the blogosphere; there were few if any NDP blogs.

Following the debate on the blogs around the April 6, 2008 Facebook strike Mohamed Morsi met with some youth bloggers and tried – but did not succeed – to change their minds. Mahmoud Ezzat encouraged some MB bloggers to write against the dissidents "but since they

were not famous" they had little if any impact (Mahmoud 2008). The top leadership appealed directly to activist bloggers because they were influential and out of the (perhaps unarticulated) belief that they led the youth generation. The fact that they also appealed to other young bloggers, who were part of the third generation of MB bloggers, to write against the more famous ones shows not only that they recognized the critical organizational role bloggers played within the MB but also they the leadership does not control its younger generation. Hamza pointed to the failure of other ideological groups to come out and support the MB in the streets in 2004 and 2005 to explain why he thought the group did not participate in the strike. But their cautious approach was also in line with its approach to participating in political contestation in the streets: hold back, endorse cautiously and coordinate with other factions. This cautious, incremental approach, however, did not resonate with its young activists and contributed to widening the generational gap and the independence of the younger activist generation from the movements' leaders.

Not Leading the Revolution

The same dynamic of caution and incrementalism that was seen during the 2005 constitutional referendum protests and the April 6, 2008 Facebook strike was seen during the first few days of the Egyptian revolution, when the Brotherhood leadership initially hesitated to endorse the protests called for January 25, 2011. In the wake of the successful Tunisian revolution, which ousted President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in a matter of weeks following widespread protests that were in many cases organized via social media and by cyberactivists, activist Ikhwan youth rejected the hesitancy of their leadership. Several MB youth were among

the key organizers in the lead up to the protests and in the Revolutionary Youth Council that emerged during the protests to help shape their demands and envision their future. They were enthusiastically redefining the possibilities of collective action by calling for Mubarak's ouster, but actively avoiding any actions or discourse that would enable the mainstream media to characterize the revolution as a Brotherhood or Islamic project.

When the Ikhwan leadership finally endorsed participation in the protests scheduled for Jan. 28, many of their younger members were already in the streets, occupying Tahrir Square with their secular counterparts and leading demonstrations calling for Mubarak to step down. Their participation extended into the blogosphere and social media as hundreds of Brotherhood members changed their Facebook pictures to the iconic Jan25 logo, posted pictures and videos on their social media and blogs, and encouraged their friends and virtual networks to participate. The youth helped compel the leadership to support the revolution by demonstrating in the streets as well as setting up impromptu medical clinics, providing emergency services to protesters, and keeping a low profile. As the protests continued to draw millions and capture the attention of the world, the Brotherhood adopted a pragmatic approach designed to avoid accusations that it was an Islamist project or that they were playing a leading role.

The Brotherhood was very active as the protests continued, lending its organizational power and experience providing social services but careful to play a muted role and remain in the background. Skeptics and pundits inside Egypt and in the West warned of the potential pitfalls of the unknown – that is, any leader besides Mubarak – and the strength of the MB's organizational and political power, which could overpower any democratic contest with less institutionalized parties. The MB leadership carefully managed their message to avoid accusations that the revolution was an Islamist project or would necessarily result in an Islamic state. In an editorial

for *The Guardian* newspaper out of London, MB spokesman Mohammad Morsi sought to play down the movement's ideology and elevate the principles of democracy, political rights and freedom of expression.

> Accusations that we aim to dominate or hegemonise the political system could not be further from the truth, and all our literature and public statements emphasise that we see ourselves as part of the fabric of Egyptian social and political life… Uniquely this moment is one that no political party can claim to own, to lead or to have triggered. Rather, it was a natural reaction by the population to the miserable state of its country. (Morsi 2011)

The youth, as well as the leaders, wanted to avoid painting the revolution as an Islamist or Brotherhood-inspired one. Although Muslim Brotherhood cyberactivists were among the youth in Tahrir Square helping to direct the protests, and the rank and file was among the millions who joined the street protests, they were strategically conscience of the importance of perception at home and abroad. For example, when a PBS Frontline crew caught a MB member waving a Quran in front of the camera, their young MB host took the man aside and told him not to do so because it would detract from their efforts to avoid having the revolution labeled an Islamist one by the Western media. "For God's sake, don't hold up your Quran. Hold up an Egyptian flag. For God's sake. That's not for the media," Mohammed Abbas, a MB member of the Revolutionary Youth Council. "Don't show the ideology to the press because this is so bad for this revolution" (Kirk 2011).

Implicit in the statements and silences of MB members was recognition of the power of the media to frame the revolution, to define its origins and aspirations. They were acutely aware that the media defines the political reality of particular events, or what Goldfarb calls "televisual power of definition," and it was small things like holding up a Quran or shouting Islamist slogans that could redefine and potentially undermine the revolution (Goldfarb 2006, 59, 121).

Conclusion

The bloggers of the Muslim Brotherhood played a pivotal public role in the movement as they became interlocutors with a wider public and challenged stereotypes about Islamists and Muslim women. This conferred on them a privileged role within the organization, giving them access to top leaders and influence beyond that of most ordinary members, though it was not carte blanche as the April 6 episode demonstrated. The Muslim Brotherhood was also initially hesitant to support the January 25, 2011 protest. But after millions turned out in the streets, the Brotherhood officially endorsed the protests on January 28. Throughout the 18 days of demonstrations the Brotherhood made a concerted effort to avoid being seen as directing the protests or associating calls for change with religion, and particularly to keep a low profile on camera. A documentary about some of the MB protesters in Tahrir Square showed a Brotherhood youth leader explicitly telling a fellow protester to keep the Quran out of it and off camera (Kirk 2011). He seemed to know that such pictures could easily find themselves flying across the globe and becoming a symbol of the revolution.

The digital activists of the MB youth helped propel their organization's leadership to take part in the defining movements of their generation, from the Kefaya street protests to the April 6, 2008 Facebook Strike and the January 2011 uprising. They were at the forefront of streets demonstrations and virtual protests, using blogs and social media as outlets for itjihad, questioning traditions, orthodoxy and authoritative interpretations of Islamic practice and organizational prerogatives. These digital media platforms also helped reconfigure power dynamics within the organization, empowering the younger generation to speak up and engage in the process of ijma', or consensus building about the direction the organization should take or

principles it should adopt. Blogs and social media created new public fora where youth could identify as members of the Brotherhood, and put forth their unfiltered views and practice isnad in a new way.

The emergence of blogs and other small media helped empower the subaltern voices of Muslim Brotherhood youth, and particularly liberal, open-minded youth, because they were linked into a broader community through ijma' around the values of the blogosphere, particularly itjihad, free speech and women's rights. These media platforms helped shift the balance of power between individual young Ikhwan voices embedded in the small media of blogs and social media and the authoritative voices of the leadership as well as the mainstream media. These small media empowered young MB members to challenge orthodoxy about who and what the Brotherhood was and what it believed in and reframe the organization within the mainstream media. Secretive, illegal and religious, the Brotherhood was vilified and made a scapegoat by Egyptian and Westerners for decades but now stands poised to play a substantial role in post-revolutionary politics. As MB youth activist put it, "The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood thought they were the only ones who can get people to the streets. Now they realize that the youth, from the Muslim Brotherhood and many other groups, have real power. This will provide the youth with more power and more space" (Cambanis 2011). This also garnered these youth symbolic capital within the organization, as evidenced by the personal influence they had with the leadership.

Just as the arrests of key leaders and individual cyberactivists in Egyptian society generally drew attention to the virtual public sphere and amplified its reach, this same visibility also propelled many Ikhwan to create blogs. The pattern of adoption and diffusion within the Muslim Brotherhood replicated that of the Egyptian blogosphere more broadly, with core early

adopters becoming key nodes in a network that expanded to include activists and then a broader and more diverse range of voices. But just as in broader Egyptian society, the use of new media and digital spaces was overwhelmingly the purview of activists and youth, though organizationally the Muslim Brotherhood was an early adopter of online media since they lacked venues for participation in the mainstream media. There were also other forces at work that had to do with organizational structures of political opportunity and internal ferment within the organization the became key points of contention within the organization internally as a secretive organization had its internal workings subjected to highly visible internal critique in the blogosphere. Blogging was reflexive and reactive not just on the personal level, but organizationally as well, reflecting new practices and new practitioners of virtual itjihad, isnad and ijma'.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: REVOLUTION 2.0

"I heard 'em say the revolution won't be televised; Aljazeera proved 'em wrong, Twitter has him paralyzed" – Omar Offendum

The 2011 uprising in Egypt that ousted president Hosni Mubarak after two decades of rule did not just happen, it was the culmination of a long process of awareness raising and movement formation, as I have laid out in the previous chapters. The social media-mediated interactions and politically entrepreneurial uses of digital and social media by young Egyptians enabled a new form of agency to emerge in Egyptian politics as they discussed, debated, and enacted dissent. But the shift in expectations and imaginations among the youth at large and the general public – due in part to years of blogging against red lines, for free expression, and in support of cross-ideological solidarity – were also crucial because they prepared the public for collective action when the Tunisian uprising lit the spark. The Egyptian youth movement was able to trigger specific mechanisms and sequences of mechanisms that strategically leveraged the technological properties of the Internet and social media platforms. In doing so they enabled the expressive potential of the young generation and created a new form of contentious politics that gave rise to alternate public spheres where micropolitical actions and dialogue created the potential for autonomous political action.

In this chapter, I return to the four questions posed at the beginning of the dissertation and connect the movement generated in the first decade of the post-millennial era to the 2011 uprising that toppled President Mubarak. The previous chapters analyzed how Egyptian

cyberactivists created a new, leaderless, cross-ideological social movement that pioneered and perfected many tactics in the cyberactivist repertoire of contention. These repertoires leveraged the power of the Internet. global media, and transnational advocacy networks and helped carve out a new public sphere in the blogosphere that facilitated collective action in the embodied public sphere. In too many accounts, the pre-history of networking and coalition building has been underplayed, but it was an important part of the story, as this dissertation has shown.

Coda: Cyberactivism and the Revolution

By the end of 2010, internet use was at 31.4 percent and Egypt had nearly four million Facebook users, representing about five percent of the population, and about 40,000 Twitter users, of which Egyptians accounted for about half (SpotOn PR 2011). In August 2010, Arabic was the fastest growing language on Facebook, which had nearly 17 million users in the region, meaning that news and information flowed quickly through these social networks (Al Tarzi 2011). The Tunisian uprising and ouster of President Ben Ali provided the spark for the public at large to rise up, and Egypt's youth movement was able to draw on its years of preparation and the groundwork laid in the blogosphere. Although blogosphere was the genesis of calls for collective action, originating from the We Are All Khaled Said Facebook page, they quickly spread via digital word and embodied mouth. Cyberactivists posted calls across a range of social media platforms for their fellow Egyptians to join them on the streets on January 25, National Police Day, to protest police violence and demand changes to how their country was governed, including ending the state of emergency and enacting presidential term limits. Youth activists distributed fliers, text messages, and signs to bridge the digital divide and link the virtual and

embodied public spheres. They had learned from the last major protest on April 6, 2008 that I described in Chapter Five that such broad-based support was crucial. And indeed that last Friday in January millions of people took to the streets and filled the public squares in an outpouring of popular discontent.

By the time the January uprising took place, Facebook pages and Twitter hashtags had become an integral part of political protest throughout the Arab region. Cyberactivists used hashtags to aggregate news and information on Twitter and focus the conversation that quickly become global as the peaceful uprising captured the world's attention. Egyptian cyberactivists managed to get their hashtag #jan25 to become a worldwide trending topic (along with #Egypt and #Mubarak) on February 1 on a service with more than 200 million subscribers, a fact that underscores the substantial impact a few voices can have in a global public sphere when amplified.[244] Becoming a trending topic helps generate media attention even as it helps organize information. Trending triggers amplification in the media because it is still "new" and "innovative" and thus newsworthy according to the constitutive rules of journalism, which has remained infatuated with social media platforms even as they become increasingly ubiquitous. The power of social media to help shape the international news agenda is one of the ways in which cyberactivists subvert state power and the hegemony of state-dominated national media systems.

[244] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/courtney-c-radsch/repertoires-of-repression_b_815714.html

Figure 15 Graffiti on a wall in Zamalek, Egypt from the, 2011 uprising. Photo by Courtney C. Radsch.

By 2011 the technoinstitutional dynamics of cyberactivism had shifted as the Mubarak regime had become more adept at using and monitoring the blogosphere. Authorities blocked Twitter before deciding to close off access to the Internet for the entire country in an attempt to swell the popular uprising (Greenberg 2011). Technological developments in social media platforms coupled with the convergence of mobile and internet technology had changed the environment and hence the dynamics of the Egyptian blogosphere, making it nearly impossible for the authorities to staunch the flow of information without a full-scale shut down of the internet and mobile phone networks. This was, in fact, the step Mubarak took in late January

2011 in an attempt to thwart the wave of popular protest against his rule. Shortly after midnight on January 28, Mubarak took the radical step of shutting down the entire Internet and blocking mobile services. Weeks earlier, Tunisia's deposed president had blocked access to Twitter and YouTube, but nonetheless ended up fleeing to Saudi Arabia. Egyptian authorities adopted "a very careful and well-planned method to screen off internet addresses at every level, from users inside the country trying to get out and from the rest of the world trying to get in," namely at the DNS and the ISP levels.[245] But it backfired, and rather than staunching the organizational and publicity capabilities of activists it encouraged average Egyptians to take to the streets to find out for themselves what was happening and demand political change.

Furthermore, as I have argued throughout the dissertation, cyberspace and the embodied world are mutually constituted, and the regime's response underscored its lack of understanding about the nature and reach of the youth movement that had emerged and the popular discontent of the public. Activists found ways to bypass the digital blackout as they sought to frame the uprising as a popular, secular revolution. Google and Twitter provided workarounds to enable people in Egypt to use social media and evade censorship even when internet and mobile services were cut, including providing international landline numbers for internet access, 'speak2tweet' enabling Twitter posting via voicemail, and cloud servers.[246] Landlines continued

[245] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/28/internet-egypt-shut-off_n_815495.html. Such a broad blackout in such an economically and politically powerful country was unprecedented, and required Mubarak to make a calculation that shutting off was less risk than staying online. Although Burma and Iran had attempted to do the same, such a possibility seemed to be off the table in Egypt given Mubarak's investment in expanding internet connectivity and computer access over the past decade and undermined a decade of efforts, as detailed in Chapter Three, to position Egypt as an ICT hub (indeed in 2010, Egypt's IT sector garnered $1 billion). It also raised significant concerns about the risk of doing business there, but the cost-benefit calculation had shifted and Mubarak thought he could prevent key repertoires of contention by restricting access to the digital realm. The government maintained the Internet blackout for five days, and the OECD estimated the cost at about $90 million, or $18 million a day, between three and four percent of the country's GDP for the period of the blackout

[246] http://www.twitter.com/speak2tweet

to be available, and cyberactivists encouraged their fellow Egyptians to leave their wireless connections unlocked and created wireless internet relays to neighboring countries by stringing together access points. The Tor network urged supporters around the world to join the virtual proxy cloud.[247] These solutions were publicized by people around the world through social media and experienced cyberactivists, like Manal and Alaa, who posted detailed instructions on how to circumvent the near total censorial blackout on their blogs.[248]

But although the blogosphere and social media were important in the initial mobilization stage, and to organize medical and other assistance during the protests, it was the fact that popular support transcended cyberspace and hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets. One needed only look out the window to see the streets of Alexandria, Cairo, Sharqiya, Suez and countless other cities in Egypt that were flooded with protesters who managed to push back police trucks, throw back tear gas containers, and who, in hundreds of cases, traded their life for the hopes of their country.

The digital blackout was a powerful reminder of the power of older technologies and the importance of years of organization and movement building, with innovative solutions emerging to merge the best of both. As Gillmor aptly observed in his book *We the Media,* "in country after country where free speech is not given, the blogosphere matters in far more serious ways. This is the stuff of actual revolutions" (Gillmor 2006, 140). This dissertation has contributed to a more analytical and nuanced understanding of how, precisely, the blogosphere and new ICTs matter.

Indeed this dissertation has argued that it is not simply about access, but about how these ICTs are used and integrated into daily and political life, that make the difference. In fact,

[247] https://www.accessnow.org/proxy-cloud/page/join-the-cloud

[248] http://www.manalaa.net/dialup

Internet and Facebook penetration does not appear to correlate with political upheaval. One likely explanation for this is that some of the Gulf countries, which have the highest penetration rate, host significant numbers of foreign workers and resident expats, including significant percentages of Westerners (representing some 70 percent of the population in the UAE, for instance, perhaps explaining why this country has the highest level of Facebook penetration in the region at 35 percent, and one of the highest levels of internet penetration at nearly 76 percent) (Africa 2011; Al Tarzi 2011; Messieh 2011). Libya, on the other hand, had an Internet penetration rate of only 5 percent and a Facebook use of only 2.75 percent at the time of its uprising against President Mouammar Ghaddafi. Tunisia and Egypt were somewhere in the lower middle half of the region, with internet access rates of 34 percent and 21percent respectively, with sixteen percent and five percent on Facebook at the time of their uprisings (Messieh 2011; Mourtada and Salem 2011).

The debate about what role the internet and social media played in the Egyptian and Arab uprisings has largely been one between technological determinists in the 'liberation technologies' camp, and those who discount the role of new media technologies because of the durability of authoritarianism and the so-called 'Net Delusion' (Diamond 2010; Morozov 2009a, 2011). Since the 2011 uprisings, these two camps have been positioned against each other, often with the other as a false straw man, as there are few people who credibly argue the extremes of either position. Much of this analysis has focused somewhat narrowly on how ICTs reduce the barriers to collective action by reducing organizational barriers and information scarcity (Bennett 2012; Faris 2010; Shirky 2008; Talbot 2011). And my research supports these findings and offers new empirical evidence for them. The evidence provided here, furthermore, is situated outside of the democratic West, which has tended to dominate social movement theorizing until

recent years, and in an authoritarian regime, thus offering more nuanced understanding of dynamics of contention in different regime types. But although reducing the barriers to collective action is an important explanation for explaining the development and outcomes of contentious politics, I have argued in this dissertation that it is an insufficient explanation because one must look at a) collective identity processes through, for example, interrogating the phenomenological lifeworlds of individuals and cross-ideological solidarities and b) technoinstitutional and spatiotemporal dynamics.

The net delusionists have tended to focus on the repression and surveillance made by possible by new ICTs, through, for example, the creation of panopticonic situations or overt manipulation by authorities (Whitten-Woodring 2009). But these often do not account sufficiently for the role of human agency or focus on the worst and most repressive cases that have limited explanation for "authoritarianism lite" cases like Egypt, where the system was not completely repressive and there was some room to operate. The former camp tends to start with analysis at the meso-level rather than explain how individuals come to identify as a group in the first place; they start from the presumption of a collective, without interrogating how such a collective identity is brought into being, particularly in repressive societies or across ideological groups. They do not provide a robust enough explanation for precisely how and why reducing the barriers to collective action can spur collective action, that is, how networked ICTs turn potentiality into actuality. My research helps fill that gap through the identification of new mechanisms of contention and particular sequences that contribute to the development of collective identity and action as well as the particular technological dynamics that impact these processes. The section below lays out these key contributions.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The answers to the questions posed in the introduction about how ICTs are implicated in processes of political change, how social media enable contentious politics, and what the political impact of blogs and social media are in authoritarian contexts, are multifaceted and address different levels of analysis, thus providing a rich understanding of the link between new media technologies and political change. The fourth question about how citizen journalism alters the dynamics of state-dominated media systems is implicated in the answers to the questions above, although the findings suggest that there are some time-sensitive implications that may shift as the "newness" wears off and citizen journalism is incorporated and co-opted by mainstream media. The findings of this dissertation have implications for the transitional period in Egypt as well as for the study of media and politics, new social movements and citizen journalism more generally. In the following section, I use the three-pronged framework I proposed to make sense of these findings and draw out their broader implications.

A central finding that emerges from this research is that new ICTs facilitate social contention under the right conditions, and thus are contingent to some degree on factors independent of human agency, such as the media and the legal regulatory system, time and space dynamics, and technological infrastructure. By emphasizing the relational aspect of social movements and social networks in the study of collective action and contentious politics through a focus on both individual participation and institutional dynamics, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of *how* new media technologies and networks matter in contentious politics. Indeed a key finding in this dissertation with broad implications for the study of social movements is that one must account for both the micro-processes of identity formation, meso-

processes of collective identity formation, and opportunity structures (including technological). In other words, both the phenomenological lifeworlds of activists as individuals and how they come together as a group or as "makers of claims," *and* the configuration of technoinstitutional dynamics that facilitated or impeded this process are implicated in processes of political change. Yet most accounts fail to uncover the complicity between communication technology, sociopolitical structures, and conceptual apparatuses.

Enabling Expressive Potential: Empowerment & Citizen Journalism

Cyberactivists, and particularly citizen journalists, radically shift the informational status quo in authoritarian regimes by witnessing, putting on record and imbuing political meaning to symbolic efforts to define quotidian struggles against social injustice, harassment and censorship as part of a broader movement for political reform. In doing so they can develop consensus around the right to demand political change and lay the groundwork for asabiyah and the development of collective identity. This has wide ramifications for reform movements around the world and the stability of authoritarian regimes, which often depend on the media as a key element of the hegemonic apparatus and its ideological structure (Gramsci 1992).

The empirical chapters focused on analyzing how the micropolitics of political change and the way that the free expression and dialogue about human rights and regime abuses, which social media platforms enabled to take place in the public sphere, generated political power. This came through collective action on- and offline by young activists in the blogosphere. In the process, they challenged the hegemony of state-dominated media systems, with significant implications for the mediated public sphere in systems that lack democratic mechanisms for participation.

In order to undermine this hegemony and bring about change in the mediated public sphere, citizen journalism had to reorient the logic of the professional journalism field to gain access and power. Field theory is helpful for understanding how the creation of a new public sphere in the blogosphere gave rise to new types of agency and dynamics of political power. Since there are dominant positions and agents in a given field who have an interest in maintaining their distinction and position, when a new field of power emerges it has the potential to reorient that field to itself (Bourdieu 1989, 1998). Thus the blogosphere, when it became an important alternative public sphere, put pressure on the mediated public sphere and the journalistic field to reorient their internal logics, from incorporating new entrants to competing according to new rules. Indeed agents are distributed in a given field or social space according to the accumulation and structure of their capital and its value in that system, so that, for example, award winning journalists who are also salaried occupy more powerful positions than counterparts who have not won any awards or get paid per article, meaning that they are better positioned to play a certification role and can trigger amplification more easily than other agents.

This also explains some of the tension in the Egyptian journalism field between new entrants like the citizen journalist "upstarts" and more established professional journalists. Traditional journalists tried to maintain their positions in journalism against upstart bloggers by attempting to deny them access to the field and refusing to certify them as journalists. But because some bloggers, namely citizen journalists, played by the constitutive and normative rules of the journalistic field, other, more powerful actors certified them (such as Al Jazeera and Reporters Sans Frontières), making the lack of certification by local, state-owned media outlets somewhat irrelevant. Similarly, incorporation of blog content and hiring of citizen journalists by independent Egyptian media outlets reconstituted the regulative rules of the field from inside,

signaling that indeed some types of blogging were newsworthy and could be considered journalism. The combined pressure from external and internal agents shifted the logic of the Egyptian journalism field to enable new entrants and reconfigure power relations.

Citizen journalists gained certification and became an identifiable type of blogger by engaging in practices that looked and functioned like journalism. They served a public interest, and highlighted the discrepancy between themselves and the state-dominated mainstream media in adhering to the regulative rules of journalism. In doing so they garnered symbolic power, which endowed them with the ability to play a certification role in the broader blogosphere. Meanwhile the lack of adherence by some professional journalists to the rules of the journalistic field (such as not covering newsworthy events, not publishing truthful or accurate accounts) undermined the power of the mainstream media.

The implications of shifting who has certification power and thus the ability to play a certification role, who can endow symbolic power on someone or certify someone as a journalist, are relevant beyond this case and, I would argue, have become increasingly important amid the globalization of media and protest. Digital dissent increasingly leverages networks of transnational activists and media, meaning that social movements can draw on a wider range of symbolic power resources. But this also has implications for how a social movement must structure itself, since only certain languages and a coherent frame can easily trigger these amplification + certification sequences.

Once they were positioned within the journalistic field, citizen journalists could put different kinds of pressure on the media and draw on new power resources. The difference between a citizen journalist and a blogger, as explained in Chapter Four, is two-fold. First, not all bloggers are citizen journalists, but those who observe the constitutive rules of journalism and

consciously adopt this subject position are. Second, bloggers can commit acts of journalism, although they may choose not to adopt the subject position or continuously engage in journalistic practices. By constituting the blogosphere as an alternative public sphere, the constitutive and normative rules of blogging took precedence over those of journalism, enabling some actors to participate in other fields but also excluding those who did not observe those rules. Cross-ideological support for free expression and commenting were among such rules, meaning that those who did not believe in free expression or who did not engage with other members of the Egyptian blogosphere were unlikely to obtain powerful positions in that sphere. Whereas those who engaged and strongly supported the ideals of the early blogosphere occupied more powerful positions in the field, due to both the rules of the blogosphere and the dynamics of technological amplification. Therefore bloggers such as Sandmonkey, Hamalawy or Abdel Monem, though coming from radically different ideological camps, were powerful agents in blogosphere. They were central nodes in the network and by linking to or sharing content they could amplify and certify it. Similarly, after accruing so much symbolic (and some economic) capital through recognition for his citizen journalism, Wael Abbas became a certification agent himself, as illustrated in the discussion of the Emad al Kabir and subsequent torture videos in Chapter Four.

Citizen journalism was a particularly successful repertoire for influencing both the domestic mediated public sphere and the global mediated public sphere. It was most successful when particular sequencing of mechanisms took place, as the Eid al-Fitr, April 6, and Muslim Brotherhood *Ensaa* cases described in Chapters Four and Five highlighted, as alterations or the inability to trigger particular mechanisms could result in a failure of collective action, as the Sudanese refugee incident and the Ninja episode highlighted.

I identified six key mechanisms/pairs of mechanisms that emerged as important explanatory processes, including four previously unidentified mechanisms – asabiyah, isnad, ijma' and the generational divide– along with the concepts of technological determinism and technological certification. As I explained in Chapter Four: Citizen Journalism in the Era of Social Media, the following key sequences explain why, or why not, cyberactivism in the form of citizen journalism succeeded:

- Peer-to-peer sharing & isnad + Translation of Arabic posts → amplification (with frame) in independent Egyptian and/or global media → increase in traffic to blogs = technological amplification **=>** certification (by media + technological) = win in framing contest
- Peer-to-peer sharing & isnad → amplification (without frame) ≠> certification
- Injustice → peer-to-peer sharing → ijma' + amplification → asabiyah **=>** potential for collective action

Peer-to-peer sharing was an important trigger for amplification, as the Eid al-Fitr and Emad al-Kabir episodes highlighted, but were not sufficient to trigger amplification in the mainstream media, whether domestic or global, as demonstrated by the Sudanese refugee massacre. Amplification often triggers certification, but not always. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood ninja episode analyzed in Chapter Six, ostensibly peaceful and satirical, was amplified in the mainstream media but with a very different frame. Although the Ikhwan bloggers attempted to reframe the incident, they failed to win the framing contest and therefore were unable to trigger certification. That is why framing is another important mechanism and is

linked with amplification, since the latter without the former can backfire, and even lead to decertification.

The link between these two mechanisms also indicates why the absence or presence of state-controlled media in specific episodes matters. Framing contests were easily won in the blogosphere when the state media were absent until the last moment (January 25, 2011; April 6, 2008; Eid el Fitr 2006). Certification can also happen without amplification, if the agent is located in a position of power, such as a key node in the network or famous.

The generational divide, meanwhile, explained different levels of adeptness as technological adaption and integration into daily life as well as the capacity to trigger asabiyah or consensus. When there was a stark generational divide, such as between the middle-aged leaders of Kefaya and the young bloggers, or the older leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and the young Ikhwani bloggers, it could exacerbate differences in movement priorities, framing, and responses to repression. The first generation of Egyptian bloggers, who pioneered cyberactivism and citizen journalism and were persecuted by the regime, was smaller and more interactive than later generations of bloggers. The latter were less likely to know each other in person and participated in the blogosphere on a wider variety of platforms, and thus consensus and solidarity became more difficult to achieve; it was also more contingent, rather than sustained. The generational dynamic also implies different environmental and technoinstitutional dynamics, since the Internet and connectivity continued to expand steadily and therefore the place that computers, the Internet, and social networking played in daily life, communication practices, and the like were different than the first generation; media institutions, governmental entities, and business entities were present in the blogosphere on a greater scale in 2010, for example, than they were in 2005. Thus the blogosphere was more diverse and there were more types of players

influencing the contours of this expanding public sphere, so that the experience of latter generations in cyberspace differed from the first generation. The state similarly became more adept at understanding and using the blogosphere, surveillance, and the like. I proposed the concept of the generation divide as an explanatory mechanism that can capture these dynamics and account for environmental and cognitive changes that may, or may not, be related to age, but which account for time and historical context.

In Defense of "Slacktivism"

Many studies on the impact of new media on politics has focused on the availability of more information and greater choice for the public, assuming that correcting information deficiencies or building a national audience will lead towards democratization or political empowerment (Sreberny 2001). And indeed these networked media help activists overcome the problem of information scarcity, which often prevents people from engaging in collective action because they do not know if they will be joined by others or not. When someone sees people in their social network "like" a call to action or tweet about their participating in the streets, like going to Tahrir Square, they have higher levels of trust that it is legitimate and that others are taking similar action.

The disparaging term slacktivism -- the act of liking, retweeting or sharing something on social media -- is often dismissed by observers as "feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact" (Morozov 2009b). Yet it was a way for Egyptian youth (and subaltern groups more generally) to have their voices heard, influence the mainstream media, and share their opinions with their friends. The little acts of posting blogs, tweets, Facebook updates, videos, and pictures, helped make visible the human rights abuses so many Egyptian suffered.

But they also publicized the micropolitical and made visible previously hidden dynamics of Egyptian politics and society, from torture to sexual harassment to the secretive Muslim Brotherhood. These gestures have a ripple effect as they spread to new people with the patina of legitimacy that comes from such endorsement, while simultaneously helping that cause gain traction. People amplify information because they trust their friends. These small acts of confidence also send a signal to the mainstream media, lending weight and trustworthiness to the accounts of activists over those of established authorities. Such was the case in Egypt, when the military rulers tried to pin blame on the revolutionaries for a sectarian massacre at the state television building in the fall of 2011, but were quickly decried as liars after activists circulated contradictory videos.

Phenomenological Lifeworlds and Presumptions

The empirical chapters in this dissertation focused on analyzing how the micropolitics of political change and dialogue about human and political rights and regime abuses, which social media platforms enabled to take place in the public sphere, generate political power. Their expressive interactions about being a women or a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, about sexual harassment, about torture, or against censorship, took place on blogs and social media. And because these media were inherently participatory, networked and implicated in fields of political power, they not only undermined the hegemony of the status quo but also conditioned users to expect to be able to express themselves freely, which many in the older generation did not feel free to do.

Citizen journalism helped Egyptian citizens believe in their rights and presume them psychosocially, which created the agency for them to actually have access to them.

Blogs and social media are important tools for circumventing government dominance of the media sector and restrictive freedom of association laws that prohibit NGOs from operating or groups from gathering, and thus help shift the balance of power away from authoritarian governments. Citizen journalism alters not only how news is created and public perception influenced, but also the very political logic of authoritarian systems predicated on control of information and a monopoly on the means of media production. Egyptian youth were able to challenge the hegemony of state-owned media as citizen journalists and activists, gaining the trust and attention of the public by leveraging internet-based communications platforms and exposing the abuses of the regimes. They succeeded in using social media to compel mainstream media attention, publicize cases of torture and human rights abuses, and establish reputations as accurate, credible and trustworthy sources, in stark contrast to the mainstream media and the government. Timely and accurate reporting by young Arab cyberactivists gave them the credibility needed to become trusted information sources not only among their fellow citizens, but also with the global public eagerly trying to understand the extraordinary political change underway.

Networked social media shifts the informational status quo in authoritarian regimes, and thus reconfigures the journalistic field and the logic of a political approach based on coercion, consent and patronage. The journalistic field plays a central role in constructing and maintaining the mediated, formal public sphere, and thus shifts in the field impact the dynamics of the public sphere.

Generating New Public Spheres: Power & Participation

Changes in dominant communications reconfigure technoinstitutional dynamics, structural relationships and the logic of power in fields like journalism and politics, enabling the

formation of new public spheres and altering power relations. Those who adapt more quickly to and take advantage of the new information and communication technologies can find empowerment, and challenge the status quo. Furthermore, by situating the development of the blogosphere as public sphere within the broader "sociohistorical conjuncture," this dissertation makes visible the importance of power contexts, and how these shift as time progresses and what was new become normalized (Mankekar 1999, 49). The Egyptian blogosphere in the post-millennial period looked similar to cyberspace in the 1990s, when governments and business had not yet colonized and commoditized this new media (Rheingold 2000, 305). But this was no longer the case by the end of the post-millennial decade, by which time most media outlets, many politicians, and ever more businesses had entered the blogosphere. The extent of diversification in the blogosphere thus made it significantly different than during its formative years, and in turn influenced the activation and sequencing of some mechanisms. For example, ijma' and asabiyah became more difficult to enact, while diversification and framing contests meant that triggering amplification and certification was more challenging because there were more competitors.

Individuals in particular fields of power fight to maintain their status and distinction, like journalists, while authoritarian states attempt to maintain their hegemonic control over the media and control of the political narrative. The networked, technologically savvy youth therefore had a competitive advantage over the older, bureaucratic apparatus of the Egyptian state in the initial years. Furthermore, conceptualizing power solely from an instrumentalist perspective in which the media reflect the economic and/or ideological interests of the dominant elite assumes the audience is generally dependent and passive, which is not the case in cyberspace (McQuail 1984). The Internet is fundamentally different from other media, and thus requires new

frameworks of analysis and assumptions than the theories that emerged from the study of print, broadcast or satellite media. Thus I proposed field theory as a way to understand power dynamics of technologically inflected public spheres, which I have shown necessitate an updated conceptualization.

Habermasian versions of the public sphere tend to be static and structural, whereas my conception of public spheres is more locally contingent and inflected by the technological properties of networked ICTs. Although the internet has been the focus of public sphere theorizing since the 1990s, few have explicitly addressed the role that the properties, and in particular the algorithms of social media and collaborative filtering platforms, play in the construction of these new public spheres (Benkler 2006). An exception is Geiger, who recognized that non-discursive algorithms contribute to constructing the "blogo/public sphere" at the macro-level through aggregation, to which I would add personalization and collaborative filtering (Geiger 2009). This dissertation has argued that the algorithmic dynamics of cyberspace, in which blogospheres are situated, are implicated in the amplification and certification of some voices over others, with identity choices such as anonymity and language as well as technological acumen playing a fundamental role in triggering these mechanisms. It has also underscored the mutual constitution of the virtual and the embodied public spheres and the contiguous nature of the blogosphere and the mediated public sphere.

This dissertation has underscored that public spheres are not docile, inert venues of rational critical discourse in which everyone is an equal; they are multitudinous, conflictual, communicative spaces that include and exclude people based on constitutive and normative rules and are inflected by fields of power. The idea of a singular public sphere versus multiple public spheres has long been identified as problematic, and this dissertation contributes to a significant

body of research on the dynamics of subaltern and alternative public spheres (Calhoun 1992; Fraser 1992; Garnham 1992; Gitlin 1998; Squires 2002). My analysis has focused on three public spheres in particular: the Egyptian blogosphere, the Muslim Brotherhood blogosphere, and the mediatized formal public sphere. But this work maintains that there is analytical value in conceptualizing the public sphere in relation to the state because the analytic utility of the public sphere as a conceptual apparatus recedes if it becomes too generic, such as a term to simply replace 'community.' There may be value in understanding how online communities on a particular site, such as Slashdot or Gawker, constitute themselves and influence discourse within that community, for example (Poor 2005). But without linking these to the broader public discourse and their relationship to the state, which is typically implicated in the domain of public life, the public sphere concept loses its analytical value (Geiger 2009). The Egyptian blogosphere contributed to a process, which began with the proliferation of Arabic satellite news in the 1990s, of increasing participation in public life and public debate, both of which are critical components of democracy (Lynch 2007a; Sreberny 2001, 112).

The blogosphere also problemetized the boundary between public and private spheres. Political confrontation did not occur because of the "public use of reason" but rather through cyberactivism and citizen journalism, meaning it was not so much a Habermasian public sphere as an actively constituted venue for social negotiation (Gambetti 2009; Habermas 1989). Lynch, for example, conceptualizes the Arab public sphere along Habermasian lines by defining it in terms of active arguments and contentious debates before an audience, that is, a self-defined public, about issues of shared concern (Lynch 2006, 32). He argues that Al Jazeera created an international public sphere through its emphasis on public argument and prioritization of politics, which initiated regional public discourse on issues of concerns to Arabs and strengthened the

collective Arab identity. Lynch rightly emphasizes that such a public sphere could not have emerged without the rise of new ICTs, and that it was about what Arabs did with those new opportunities. But his Habermasian interpretation elides power dynamics inherent in a public sphere and the role that technology plays in consolidating these positions. In other words, different subject positions in the public sphere, such as famous bloggers or English-language citizen journalists, obtain privileged vantage points and symbolic power whereas others occupy less powerful or even subjugated positions, such as Arabic-language Muslim Brotherhood or state-sponsored bloggers, within a given public sphere (Gitlin 1998, 168). Indeed as a space of political contestation, the blogosphere requires reconceptualization of the public sphere from "a homogenous space of embodied subjects in symmetrical relations, pursuing consensus through the critique of arguments and the presentation of validity claims" to one of heterogeneous and disembodied *cyberspace*, in which the algorithmic designs of information and communication platforms as well as individuals play a role in communicative action and visibility (Poster 1995, 7).

This dissertation not only explained how young Egyptians used social media to create an alternative public sphere in the blogosphere, but also how they reconfigured power and participation in the mediated, authoritarian public sphere. By deploying Bourdieu's field theory to interrogate these configurations and explain how Egypt's young cyberactivists designed and deployed new repertoires of contention, the analysis has shown how they were able to alter power dynamics and the regulative rules governing particular fields of power. Specifically, citizen journalism was a particularly successful repertoire for influencing both the domestic mediated public sphere and the global mediated public sphere. It was most successful when particular sequencing of mechanisms took place, as the Eid al-Fitr, April 6, and Muslim

Brotherhood *Ensaa* cases in Chapters Four and Five highlighted, as alterations or the inability to trigger particular mechanisms could result in a failure of collective action, as the Sudanese refugee incident and the Ninja episode highlighted. The key sequences I identified in Chapters Four, Five and Six with respect to citizen journalism and cyberactivism more broadly included:

- Peer-to-peer sharing & isnad to original witnesses + translation of Arabic posts → amplification in independent Egyptian and/or global media → exponential increase in traffic to blogs + technological amplification => certification (by media + technological)
- Repression spurs peer-to-peer sharing → ijma' + amplification → asabiyah

But it was also significant that certain actors were better positioned to enact these sequences than others. These included citizen journalists who had built up a reputation, was perceived as credible, or was certified by other citizen journalists already networked into the chains of influence within the mainstream media. Indeed Egyptian cyberactivists and citizen journalists spent years laying the groundwork with journalists and media organizations, so that by the time of the 2011 uprising there were not only trusted and "certified" bloggers that professional journalists could rely on, but those bloggers often possessed certification power themselves. This meant that they could perform isnad and certify others, thereby signaling to the global media who could be trusted. This highlights the fact that those with the power to activate key sequences in these repertoires of contentions occupied particular positions in the blogosphere, and within transnational media and activist networks.

This explains why enacting the repertoire of citizen journalism did not necessarily have the same impact in different blogospheres, which themselves occupy different positions of power within the wider blogosphere and transnational media sphere. For example, when the uprising in

Syria got underway in March and April 2011, cyberactivists quickly adopted many of the same techniques as their Egyptian counterparts, posting videos and accounts of the uprising there and the violent response by the Syrian authorities. But because there were so few established citizen journalists who had been pre-certified by the international media, and the Syrian state media claimed they were falsified, Syrian cyberactivists had a more challenging time winning framing contests and activating the sequences of mechanisms needed to trigger certification and cross-ideological solidarity.

Even as the citizen media content started flowing out of Syria and making its way into the mainstream media, the ability of cyberactivists to perform isnad was problematic both because of the lack of existing reference points (e.g. bloggers with an established reputation who could enact reliable witnessing) and early credibility crises that undermined their attempts at framing the uprising. In June, the purported kidnapping of an anonymous American-Syrian woman who blogged at *A Gay Girl in Damascus* drew international media attention and prompted a global campaign by international NGOs for her release.[249] A few days later the incident and was revealed to be a hoax by an American man living in Scotland ('A gay girl in damascus' 2011). Allegations that Syrian activists were posting videos of staged attacks and violence undermined their ability to win framing contests and made certification processes more difficult to enact because media outlets were careful to qualify the fact that footage could not be independently verified; the lack of professional journalists on the ground compounded the challenge (Missteps in the syrian opposition's propaganda effort 2011; Narwani 2012). Unlike Egypt, where ijma' around the uprising was widespread, professional journalists (including foreign correspondents) were extensively present, and cross-ideological asabiyah problemetized alternative framing

[249] http://arab-media.blogspot.com/2011/06/missing-gay-girl-in-damascus-and.html

attempts by the state media, this was not the case in Syria, where the frame of a popular uprising was contested from the outset and regime supporters used many of the same strategies as the activists themselves.

In Libya, on the other hand, cyberactivists quickly achieved ijma' around the need for foreign military intervention to bolster the popular uprising and strategically targeted the Western mainstream media in making their case. Although Libyan activists also lacked the pre-existing networks of certification or relationships with the international media, they did not have the credibility challenges their Syrian counterparts encountered. There was widespread ijma' in the blogosphere among cyberactivists, with few if any pro-regime sympathizers to undermine their solidarity or framing of the uprising in the blogosphere. Cyberactivists conveyed coverage of the uprising on the ground to the international media with little contestation over the frame due to the lack of competition from Libyan state media or the authorities, and the presence of some global media on the ground (Radsch 2012). Cyberactivists set up peer-to-peer sharing networks and made a specific effort to translate Arabic posts and content to enable amplification, specifically targeting Western journalists on Twitter and other social media and successfully generating certification.

Those located in particular fields of power fight to maintain their status and distinction, like journalists, while authoritarian states attempt to maintain their hegemonic control over the media and control of the political narrative. In Egypt, as discussed, there was a professional journalist field in which the logic of competition – from independent newspapers, regional outlets like Al Jazeera, and its domestic citizen journalists – reconfigured journalistic practices and the logic of the field over the period of study. The networked, technologically savvy youth therefore had a competitive advantage over the older, bureaucratic apparatus of the Egyptian

state in the initial years. This also suggests that in state-dominated media systems where journalists are civil servants and there is little or no professional competition in the field, that pressure from new entrants may have less of an effect on the domestic field of journalism because there is less identification by journalists with the profession and its regulative rules than there is with the state and hence the political field (Benson 2006; Benson and Neveu 2005b; Bourdieu 1998; Deuze 2005). Furthermore, conceptualizing power solely from an instrumentalist perspective in which the media reflect the economic and/or ideological interests of the dominant elite assumes the audience is generally dependent and passive, which is not the case in cyberspace. The Internet is fundamentally different from other media and thus requires new frameworks of analysis and assumptions than the theories that emerged from the study of print, broadcast or satellite media.

Contentious Politics: Cyberactivism & New Social Movements

The finding that new media facilitate social contention under the right conditions is not necessarily a given, since such ICTs could also lead to greater solitariness and a focus on the individual, as many early studies of computer mediated communication feared, serve to reproduce hegemonic discourses (Gramsci 1992; Warf and Grimes 1997), or enable greater surveillance and control by authoritarian regimes as well as more democratic ones (Kalathil and Boas 2003; Morozov 2011). This study has shown how social movement formation and processes of political contestation in Egypt offer valuable insights into the role of ICTs and new media technologies in political activism that can travel beyond the specific case to contexts where freedom of expression and political participation is limited and an authoritarian logic permeates all fields of power. However, this case study also accentuates the importance of timing and process in contentious politics, and refutes the idea that the level of connectivity of social

media use necessarily correlates with the likelihood of political protest. Rather it is the level of asabiyah in the network, individual's ability to transcend ideological differences to facilitate alliances with other groups, and the strategic sequencing of key mechanisms of contention that explain the likelihood.

This dissertation has analyzed the specific ways that the Internet and social networking have facilitated the formation of new collective identities while reducing the barriers to collective action by creating new ways of building trust among strangers or dispersed groups of people. Unlike the newspapers that Anderson argues created imagined links through the arbitrary inclusion or juxtaposition of things that become linked through "calendrical coincidence," blogs include links that are far less arbitrary since the individual author chooses each one, resulting in a purposeful linking of potentially disparate and different things (1991, 33). They also serve to position and identify the author, and create a virtual community linked to that blog, Facebook profile or Twitter account.

Amplification and certification were important mechanisms for expanding the reach of bloggers and cyberactivists beyond their imagined community. As the blogosphere expanded and social networking increased in popularity, Egyptians from across the social spectrum staked out their virtual territory in the blogosphere, from Salafis to academics, from young carefree youth sharing their personal likes and dislikes to literary hopefuls trying to create enough buzz for a book. Yet even as the blogosphere expanded, especially with the rapid adoption of Facebook by young Egyptians, it nonetheless remained dominated in the public imagination by the activists who sought to maintain momentum, expand the boundaries of the public sphere, and use new media tools for their political projects. But as expansion occurs, ijma' and asabiyah became more difficult to achieve. There were still key issues that enabled cyberactivists to activate or invoke

these mechanisms during distinct moments of threat, as I discussed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. As the blogosphere diversifies and expands, however, ijma' becomes distinctly more difficult.

The creation of ideological networks across sectarian identities, party lines and communities was a critical part of the Egyptian story, and offers insight into why some of the other uprisings in the region may have failed to garner mass popular support. The cross-ideological asabiyah that developed in the blogosphere, and through which the youth movement originated, reduced the structural costs of collective action and the difficulties of organizing by expanding the possibilities of coalition building and making particular tropes about the Islamist threat or Western intervention unavailable to the regime. This is what occurred in the Egyptian revolution. But as new actors come into power, particularly one faction (such as the Muslim Brotherhood), cross-ideological solidarity becomes significantly more difficult since the stakes are higher than when the game is played between groups that have historically been excluded from participation.

Repression as Double-edged Sword

Repression, although perhaps not a mechanisms itself, is an environmental factor that influences the sequencing of mechanisms and proved to be a double-edged sword. Goldstone observed that the response by regimes and elites to conflict situation affects whether a social movement transforms into a revolution (1998b). And indeed scholars have observed in previous revolutions how repression of opponents that is either not harsh enough to quell their efforts, or targets innocents, can backfire by undermining the perception of regime legitimacy and justice (Goldstone 2003). This is precisely what happened with the arrests and torture of bloggers and

cyberactivists. The killing of Khaled Said in June 2010 was one of the most egregious in a string of attacks on young cyberactivists stretching over the past several years, which were not harsh enough to deter others and in fact helped inspire others to start blogging and become cyberactivists, thus accelerating the growth of this movement and popular protest. Choosing to use arrest and torture as tactics to punish or discipline bloggers and cyberactivists can backfire and in fact galvanized, rather than deterred, others from becoming cyberactivists. As the examples discussed in Chapters Five and Six, the 2006 arrest of Kareem Amer, the 2007 arrest of Abdel Monem, and the 2009 arrest of Rizk underscored:

- Repression → asabiyah → peer-to-peer sharing + amplification → ijma' => potential for collective action

Repression prompted bloggers to launch campaigns calling for the release of imprisoned bloggers, which spread throughout the blogosphere as people copied and circulated them. The act of posting on one's own blog was a signal of support and helped to amplify awareness and discontent. Posting such a banner was an endorsement of the rights of those individuals that indicated to the broader community of bloggers that such rights were constitutive for the blogosphere as public sphere, as I explained in previous chapters. Ijma' was a process by which mutual interests and shared identities were constructed and discovered in the process of creating cross-ideological solidarity, underscoring a mutually reinforcing relationship between these two mechanisms, each of which is strengthened by the other. Such a conceptualization also helps us better understand why some ijma' processes become particularly powerful as well as how and why asabiyah weakens, or even disappears, when ijma' fails to occur and vice versa. Thus peer-to-peer sharing of material that crossed ideological divides not only strengthened solidarity

within the blogosphere, but also reinforced it as a realm of free speech and thus strengthened that normative commitment.

Such a process also suggests how the breakdown of cross-ideological asabiyah can occur and the nature of the blogosphere shift as new dynamics come into play. For example, if repression does not spur peer-to-peer sharing across ideological divides, then consensus around normative values and rights is not signaled and amplification may be one-sided or ideologically inflected. Without this consensus the challenge of building solidarity or constructing a group identity that would enable collective action becomes significantly harder if not impossible. In 2011 the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces arrested blogger Mikhail Nabil Sanad for writing critically about the military's economic interests, spurring a campaign for his release. However, when Muslim Brotherhood youth, some of who were bloggers, were arrested after Morsi was deposed in 2013, there was no such campaign as the blogosphere had become fractured and polarized.

The failure to develop asabiyah, or its breakdown, is a key explanatory variable in other cases as well, such as the Syrian case as discussed, as well as in Bahrain. Initially the Bahraini blogosphere shared similar characteristics with the Egyptian one, and cross-ideological solidarity, which manifested in the cross-sectarian nature of the Bahraini blogosphere in which young Sunnis and Shiite initially coalesced around the February 14, 2011 uprising. However, as the regime drew on sectarian fears and tropes with respect to Shiite dominance in a Sunni minority-ruled country, the blogosphere did not maintain ijma' around movement goals and solidarity broke down. Framing contests emerged not only between the state-owned media and bloggers, but within the blogosphere as well between the revolutionary cyberactivists and pro-regime bloggers, reducing the potential for collective action and making it difficult to enact the

repertoires of contention. The framing contests also meant that the content generated by those who supported the uprising did not trigger technological amplification and certification as easily. Furthermore, repression by the regime failed to trigger solidarity, as it had in Egypt.

Development Progression

The nature of the Egyptian blogosphere shifted between 2004 when it emerged and 2011. It was born of experimentation with political activism, setting it on a trajectory that favored and amplified the voices and organizers of political dissent even as it expanded to include Egyptians who were not activists. During Mubarak's regime and the post-millennial period, the blogosphere thus developed as a realm of activism devoted to political change, human rights and social justice, rather than a mélange of media, business and personal blogs as in the case of many other countries. In the United States, for example, Dahlberg has argued that the commercialization and political partisanship, among other factors, have limited the formation of an online public sphere there (2001). Blogging was a decisively political practice, creating new dynamics configured by the politico-economic, technological, and legal opportunity structures. The opportunities structures thus configured helped bloggers propel Egyptian cyberactivism into the limelight and channel the blogosphere's development into an activist sphere of contestation.

By the end of 2006 the blogosphere had grown exponentially, the Muslim Brotherhood began to have a noticeable presence and Kefaya was losing its momentum. By late 2006 the Egyptian blogosphere expanded to include thousands of Egyptians and the emergence of the subaltern into the public realm. During this phase one could distinguish virtual enclaves or communities of bloggers in which asabiyah was primarily, though certainly not exclusively, enacted within sub-communities of the Egyptian blogosphere, such as activists, Leftists, Muslim

Brotherhood, literary, Copts, Bahai, homosexuals, Salafis, social commentators and personal bloggers. By 2007 the blogosphere was diversifying and fragmenting as more and more people joined and new platforms fragmented the online community. Facilitated by increasing access and technological developments that created new virtual venues for social networking and made Arabic-language platforms widely available, the blogosphere expanded to include a more diverse array of individuals and a wider array of virtual venues, especially social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. It had also evolved beyond a realm of activism, although it remained a core venue and tool for political contestation. And media attention took blogs and social networking from the Internet to the living room on nightly news shows and with the support by international human rights organizations and donors.

The pattern of progression from experimentation to activism to diversification also appears to be common to subaltern virtual spaces and their enclaves, as well as to other blogospheres where there are few institutionalized voices. Egyptian cyberactivists colonized the Egyptian blogosphere and the government largely abdicated any significant presence in cyberspace for the first decade of the 21st century. Despite e-government initiatives and targeting of bloggers and cyberactivists offline, as discussed in Chapter Three, the Mubarak regime never put up a significant challenge to the creation and use of the blogosphere as a form and forum for political activism. Although it implemented ID checks and surveillance in Internet cafes and arrested cyberactivists for their embodied activism, Mubarak and the ruling party were conspicuously absent in the formative years of the blogosphere. Unlike their Chinese, Iranian, Israeli and Saudi Arabian counterparts who paid legions of bloggers to post, comment and tweet pro-government messages in hopes of influencing public opinion in the cybersphere and countering the effect of anti-regime rhetoric, Mubarak never adopted this approach. As one

blogger put it, the regime appeared to have "too much on its hands already to worry about blogs" (El Amrani 2006). The Mubarak regime never really used social media, or created official accounts to facilitate information flows as regimes elsewhere were wont to do, essentially abdicating framing control and narrative to oppositional voices and the youth. In Iran, on the other hand, the government created a "cyberbasiji" army of estimates of more than 250,000 pro-regime bloggers who take the political battles fought offline into the realm of cyberspace, actively seeking to control the narrative (Reporters Sans Frontières 2009). Similarly in China, where the "50-Centers" or public opinion manipulators post party-approved comments, the authorities seek to actively manage online public opinion (Kelly and Cook, 2011; Nan, 2008). This meant that triggering technological amplification became more difficult as well, since there was more competition in this space. Since there were virtually no pro-regime bloggers in Egypt for the first several formative years, there was literally an alternate reality online to that on the ground in "real" life, where Mubarak and his regime monopolized vast swaths of the public sphere but were nearly impotent online. The Egyptian military, on the other hand, started a Facebook page as soon as it came to power following the 2011 uprising and regularly used it to make announcements and break news.

The reason that pro-regime bloggers did not emerge as a subsection of the blogosphere was twofold: First, the blogosphere emerged amid a grassroots political movement that fundamentally shaped the trajectory of the blogosphere as a venue for and of political activism and citizen journalism. Second, Mubarak underestimated the power of the youth and the importance of social media and digital communication networks in the post-millennial period. This suggests that in other cases where non-state, non-commercial, agents of change colonize cyberspace first, they can leverage that public sphere to generate political power. It also suggests

that there is likely a bandwidth of space needed to operate, so that this dynamic is unlikely to apply in the most highly restrictive environments or the most open environments. This finding is also linked to repression, since too much would dampen collective action and too little could fail to trigger processes of asabiyah and the framing of injustice/dignity.

Figure 16 Graffiti on a wall in Zamalek, Egypt that reads '7RYA', the SMS spelling of the word for freedom in Arabic. Photo by Courtney C. Radsch.

Before a movement can advance collective action frames, such frames must first be articulated. Tracing how these frames develop, proliferate, and come to dominate or dissipate, reveals how such virtual collective action and identity frames become concrete instantiations, for

example through their rearticulation in the mainstream media, since this is a constitutive process that would indicate the presence of a cognitive mechanism of transgression (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Once articulated, these frames became dominant not only among citizen journalists but in the mainstream media, and even outside the country as well. Thus what was once invisible is made visible via a circuitous route stretching beyond national boundaries and publics. One could ask whether virtual contentious politics that occur in the virtual reality of cyberspace and satellite signals have a concrete reality, or whether they are merely simulacrum in which the difference between image and the reality is no longer important (Baudrillard 2005). If such virtual reality substitutes the simulated for the real, can the hyper-reality of virtual contentious politics translate into concrete instantiations of contentious politics? This dissertation has argued that indeed virtual contention can be translated into real-world contestation and that in fact it is the initial frames, networks, and identities constructed in cyberspace that provide the fuel for concrete instantiations.

Mechanisms and Sequencing: The Technological Inflection in Dynamics of Contention

This dissertation has added to the conceptual apparatus of social movement theory by identifying new dimensions of standard mechanisms in the literature, such as amplification and certification, as well as identifying several new mechanisms that have emerged from the fact that contemporary repertoires of contention are technologically inflected. In particular the technological amplification and technological certification mechanisms are important contributions that can highlight the importance and centrality of ICTs to contentious repertoires, and explains how they are mutually reinforcing. The right sequencing can trigger certification cascades, as I label them, and provides an explanation of why, for example, a campaign may go

viral. Furthermore, the isnad mechanism is a more accurate description of how authentification and credibility are established in cyberspace because it accounts for the variable importance of the number of reports and/or witnesses, the fame of a reporter/witness, or its uniqueness and thus can help explain why some posts go viral.

This research also uncovers how the repertoires of cyberactivism enable domestic activists to leverage the power and resources of transitional activist networks, global media and foreign policymakers, who can in turn put pressure on their own government. As the Free Kareem, April 6 and Khaled Said episodes from Chapter Five underscored, leveraging these global networks is a key strategy in the cyberactivist and citizen journalism repertoires because the Internet and social media provide low-cost and easy-to-use tools to do so.

As discussed above in the section on citizen journalism, capturing the attention of global media is also a key strategic goal for cyberactivists, who largely believe that western media attention offers some veneer of protection to them (although it can also highlight to the government who needs to be surveiled). Digital activists, especially those in aid-dependent authoritarian regimes, depend on the mainstream media to get interested and amplify their message, partially in order to put pressure on Western policymakers. The years spent developing and refining cyberactivist repertoires of contention, including citizen journalism, had shown how garnering media attention could help activists leverage the symbolic power of Western policymakers to put pressure on their own government, a strategy underscored by several campaigns including the Free Kareem and Philip Rizk campaigns, discussed in the previous chapters. These cyberactivist repertoires of contention are contributing to an ongoing process of deterritorialization of domestic politics (Sreberny 2001).

Yet this dissertation also explained how expressive potentiality, itjihad and dialogue alone, or even the creation of a new public sphere, were insufficient for explaining how these media technologies are implicated in processes of political change. Although networked social media may have enabled contentious politics, the second and third questions required consideration of the broader structural context in which these new media and their users exist. The impact of blogs and social media in authoritarian context depends in part on the structure of authoritarianism in a particular country. The legal regulatory structures and constitutive choices about national Internet architecture along with the broader politicoeconomic and foreign policy dynamics in which these are enmeshed, are critical factors that help explain the choice sets available and regime responses.

The Limitations of Leaderless Movements and ICTs

The youth movement that drove the 2011 uprising comprised leaderless networks of impassioned and fed-up Egyptians, and included many of the Core bloggers who were among Egypt's initial cyberactivists, those who laid the groundwork and helped shift the expectations of their generation. As the protests continued and drew Egyptians from the opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, the military, and the public at large, there was no single person or group leading the revolution. Thus even as Mubarak clung to power, his negotiating counterpart was unclear. The leaderless, amorphous, networked nature of the movement meant that when Mubarak left and an interim military government took over, it was unclear who they should involve in discussions to set up a new government, write a new constitution, or generally include in the new political process going forward. As with Kefaya, which succeeded as a leaderless movement

until it ossified into yet another political power structure, the movement that led to Mubarak's ouster benefited from the strength and flexibility of networks.

Yet those capable of bringing change may not be the same as those who can institutionalize it. And indeed many of these youth do not want to get involved in institutionalized politics, which poses its own set of problems with respect to consolidating the revolution. Furthermore, many of the temporal and technoinstitutional dynamics of Egypt have shifted as the newness of the blogosphere and cyberactivism have worn off and the centrality of ICT platforms in political protest, and more generally in daily life, has led to a significant expansion and diversification that makes asabiyah and ijma' more difficult to achieve.

As I have shown throughout this dissertation, the blogosphere is a public sphere where new forms of political power are generated. In Egypt this gave rise to a new type of youth-driven social movement that was created through blogging. Blogging, which is essentially a form of expression and participation, generated power and leveraged the properties of ICTs to create repertoires of contention through which they enacted this power. If power is indeed, as Arendt argued, the "ability not just to act, but to act in concert," then the ability of youth to fashion not only a new space for collective action, but also new ways to act collectively by leveraging the properties and platforms of the internet, provides insight into how subaltern and traditionally disempowered groups can generate political power in authoritarian systems (Arendt 1986).

By emphasizing the relational aspect of social movements and social networks in the study of collective action and contentious politics through a focus on both individual participation and institutional dynamics, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of *how* new media technologies and networks matter in contentious politics. Successful social movements must shift the balance of power between mainstream, authoritative state voices

embedded in broadcast and print media and alternative, and individual voices embedded in the small media of blogs and social media. But activists also must link these efforts with traditional community organizations like trade unions and religious groups to succeed in brining large-scale political change. Building cross-ideological solidarity and consensus around movement goals is a critical component of bringing about political change, a process that ICTs can facilitate but that requires time and effort, underscoring the false equivalency between mere connectivity and social mobilization. Nonetheless, diffusing power and authority across a greater swath of the public makes it more difficult for authoritarian regimes to maintain their hegemony. Meanwhile, citizen journalists can act as the Fifth Estate by attempting to keep the media and authorities accountable in systems unaccustomed to such transparency. It is this shift in the balance of power between the establishment and the younger generation that holds the most promise for a more participatory and inclusive politics in restrictive political systems.

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